

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## MODERN MANIFESTATIONS OF DIOTREPHES

### Part One

by Lee Moses

The apostle John wrote his third epistle to a faithful and beloved Christian named Gaius. In this epistle, John commended several other brethren for their faithful conduct. But the “apostle of love” had these stern words of condemnation for a man named Diotrephes:

*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).*

Most Biblical scholars believe that Diotrephes was an elder in the church where Gaius was. Regardless, he was obviously a man who insisted upon, and apparently usually got, his way in the church.

Sadly, the spirit of Diotrephes is alive and well in the world today—and in the church today. The spirit of Diotrephes manifests itself in several forms.

### Selfish Ambition

John said of Diotrephes, he “loveth to have the preeminence.”

Diotrephes put Diotrephes first, and he wanted to make sure others did as well.

Paul wrote, “*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work*” (1 Timothy 3:1). Serving the Lord’s church as an elder<sup>1</sup> is a good, noble work. But if Diotrephes was an elder, he certainly was not conducting himself as a **Biblical** elder. Peter instructed elders, “*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*” (1 Peter 5:2-3). The picture of a shepherd feeding his flock bespeaks the tender care with which an elder should work among the church. The prohibition against “*being lords over God’s heritage,*” or “*lording it over God’s heritage*” (American Standard Version), forbids an elder from taking his Divinely-ordained authority to exalt himself to a position of preeminence.

The world incessantly manifests the selfish ambition for first place. Yet Scripture warns, “*But if ye have bitter envying and strife [‘selfish ambition,’ English Standard Version] in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth*” (James 3:14). Wherever this “*selfish ambition,*” a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20),

can be found, “*there is confusion and every evil work*” (James 3: 16). One might wonder why there is so much confusion, why there are so many evil works in the world—it may have something to do with the “me first” attitude so many choose to adopt.

Someone once asked George Bernard Shaw in which age he would most have enjoyed living. He responded, “The age of Napoleon.”

His querist then asked, “Why?”

Shaw replied, “Because then there was only one man who thought he was Napoleon!”

How sad it is that there are numerous “Napoleons”—and numerous Diotrepheses—even in the Lord’s church! Everyone thinks he deserves to come first. However, in actuality **none** of us deserves to come first. In the church Christ is to have the preeminence—in **all** things (Colossians 1:18). We are to let Christ’s mind of humility and compassion be in us (Philippians 2:3-8); yet too many “Christians” take on Diotrephes’ and Satan’s mindset. And Diotrephes’ sin of loving the preeminence, his selfish ambition, ultimately led to his other sins.

### Disregard for Apostolic Authority

John said Diotrephes “*receiveth us not.*” This was an **apostle of Jesus Christ** that Diotrephes refused to receive. An apostle was “one sent,” specially chosen by Jesus Christ (Luke 6:13). The apostles were given special places of authority in the kingdom (Matthew 19:28). The word they spoke and wrote was the inspired word of God (John 16:12-13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16). To receive

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an apostle was to receive the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God the Father Himself (Matthew 10:40). But to reject an apostle was to reject Christ and the Father, and to bring upon himself a fate worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mark 6:11; Luke 10:16). The authority of an apostle was not to be disregarded, yet Diotrephes did just that.

Likewise, there are those today who disregard apostolic authority. Through the apostles' word, mankind has been given "*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). Christ's teachings given through the apostles form the doctrinal foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). But very religious people reject that apostolic authority, as did Diotrephes.

Religious denominations meet in synods, councils, and conventions to make binding doctrinal decisions. Such meetings have come to conclude that congregants can purchase the right to sin, that Mary and the supposed "successor to

Peter" (the Roman Catholic "pope") should be worshipped, and that innocent babies are born already guilty of sin—regardless of the fact that such teachings are diametrically opposed to what the apostles taught (Acts 8:20-22; 10:25-26; Matthew 19:14). Delegates to such gatherings in recent years have openly disregard the apostles' doctrine regarding homosexuality, allowing for marriage of people of the same sex (against Matthew 19:4-6) and the ordaining of practicing homosexuals as leaders in their churches (against 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 5:11-13).

Such decisions do not always take place in formal public meetings. Sometimes groups of people somehow decide they are going to ignore the apostles' doctrine in a particular area. Or an individual decides that he is only going to pay attention to the "red words" in his Bibles, since that person believes the words of Christ are more important. But Paul rebuked, "*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 14:37). The apostles wrote with "*the mind of Christ*" (2:16).

The Holy Spirit deems it essential that Christians "*be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour*" (2 Peter 3:2). However, like Diotrephes, some simply **must** have their way—even if it means disregarding the apostles' authority. John might well lament of those doing so today, "They receiveth us not."

[To be continued next issue].

<sup>1</sup> The New Testament uses the terms *bishop* and *elder* interchangeably (compare Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28 ASV).

**"I BELIEVE THE LORD, BUT ..."**

by Marvin L. Weir

Many people who profess to be Christians would angrily protest if they were told they did not believe the Lord. A failure to believe Christ is not a new problem. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said to the Jews, "*And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not*" (John 5:38). Jesus repeated His indictment again, saying, "*For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words*" (John 5:46-47). Words have meaning! Jesus forthrightly declares, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). The majority of people who profess belief **in** the Lord (that He exists) do not **believe** Christ! We will offer proof to back up this assertion.

**First, members of religious denominations claim to believe in Christ, but they do not believe what He said about building His church.** Jesus clearly states, "*...I will build **my** church*" (Matthew 16:18, bold in all Scriptures, emphasis MLW). One cannot believe this statement of the Lord and believe that He intended to build many different churches! Man has absolutely no right or authority to establish or build a church. Paul affirms what Jesus taught in saying, "*There is **one** body, and **one** Spirit, even as also ye were called in **one** hope of your calling*" (Ephesians 4:4). Paul again teaches, "*For in **one** Spirit were we all baptized into **one** body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of **one** Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Lord's

church is blood bought (Acts 20:28) and did not originate in the mind of man. Christ is "...*head over all things to the church, which is his body...*" (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Lord has promised to one day save His body [church] (Eph. 5:23), not multiple man-made religious bodies teaching contrary to His divine will! Those who align themselves with "churches" established by men may believe in Christ, but they **do not** believe what He taught.

**Second, many people believe in Christ but do not believe what He said about being called by the gospel.** It is not unusual to hear one talk about his "experience" that occurred before he was "saved." Just about every one of these "experiences" told to me differs from every other person's supposed "experience. The truth is that the Bible mentions nothing about any "experience" preceding one's salvation. Every person **called** by the Lord is called in exactly the same way—by the precious gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). The Lord's plan for one to become a member of His church requires belief (Hebrews 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3), confession (Romans 10:9-10), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The Gospel is the **only** "*power of God unto salvation*" (Romans 1:16), whether Jew or Greek! One may believe in Christ, but he does not believe Christ if he refuses to obey the gospel.

**Third, even many church members believe in Christ but do not believe what He said regarding the kingdom of God being first in their lives.** The world we live in is a busy place, and there is always something to do. However, the Lord has instructed believers to "*seek...first his kingdom, and his righteousness*" (Matthew 6:33).

Brethren must learn that spiritual matters take priority over worldly matters. One fails to seek first the kingdom when he allows things such as sports, company, school activities, recreation, or vacation take priority over assembling with the saints to worship God. Brethren may believe in Christ, but they do not believe what He said in Matthew 6:33, when they allow worldly activities (no matter how good and innocent) to cause then to **forsake** assembling with the saints (Hebrews 10:25).

**Fourth, some brethren believe in Christ but do not believe what He said about those outside of His body being lost!** It has already been established that there is a Gospel plan of salvation. Jesus said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). The Lord did not say, "*He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved,*" but this is exactly what those of denominational persuasion teach. Sadly, many brethren today are convinced there will be saved people who are **not** members of the Lord's church! The word of the Lord declares that salvation is **in** Christ (2 Timothy 2:10) and that one is "*baptized into Christ*" (Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27). Paul understood and taught that vengeance will be rendered "*to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might*" (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). One may claim to know the Lord while refusing to obey His will, but John writes, "*He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*" (1 John 2:4).

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## RUMBLINGS OF WAR

by Bob Howton

In the early spring of 1953, I struggled down the gangplank of a huge military sea transport ship, and loaded into a Navy landing craft which would take me and hundreds of other soldiers to the mainland of South Korea. I'll never forget the uncertainty and the empty feeling that overwhelmed me, as I stood huddled against others just like me on that gray, dismal morning. During the trip from the ship to the shoreline, a cadre man used a bullhorn to inform us that the rumblings which we were hearing in the distance were the sounds of our artillery. "Those," he said, "are the rumblings of war!"

Through the years I have come to recognize the fact that all too often, the unusual and disruptive rumblings which arise in our society, and in the Lord's church, are actually the early signs of battles which are looming on the horizon. On the day I cited above, the cadre man instructed each of us to "stay low, and be prepared for any emergency which might arise." Today, I would urge my brethren to keep their eyes wide open for the onslaught of false teaching, loose thinking, and new innovations which will destroy the unity of the Church and mangle that precious Body for which Christ died. These are ever present dangers, and deserve our very best efforts to refute them.

The dangerous rumblings in the Lord's Body today are legion, in my assessment. Liberalism is at the forefront, and is most dangerous. Congregations which invite and pay false teachers to come in and spew their dangerous ideas upon unsuspecting brethren are "building the tiger which will eat them." The apostle Paul gave sage advice relative to such activities, when addressing Titus. Look at his inspired instructions: "*For there are many unruly and vain talkers*



and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped” (Titus 1:10-11). It was dangerous in that day, and it’s dangerous now! Paul told the Corinthians, “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” (1 Corinthians 10:7).

Luke spoke strongly against a man who had labored to lay up treasures for himself, but was not rich toward God. How did God look upon the man? He called him a “fool”! (Luke 12:20). Our land is filled with those who will compromise God’s Holy Word to gain worldly applause. A few decades ago, the church had to struggle against such things as long hair on its men, and short skirts on its women. That phenomenon is now raising its ugly head again! Add illicit drugs and cohabitation to the growing list of sins, and, you’ll have to admit, the “rumblings” of spiritual war are everywhere!

Some of today’s rumblings emanate from “supposed” leaders who espouse the idea that “times have changed, so the church ought to change with them”! Those so minded are oblivious to the fact that the prophet Malachi stated, “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). One will get peeved, and his rumblings will disturb the sanctity and peace of the church. The rumblings of rebellion, failing to study the Word of God, remaining ignorant that “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11), and other such things, fill many a pew with the indolent, unconcerned, and apathetic of the earth. These are not trained to fight the good fight of faith, nor are they concerned that someone may have to take the stand which they rightfully should take. Let faithful soldiers arise, and put to death every false way, and stand ready, because the “rumblings” of sin’s war are ever present!

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### GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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