

Jason Upchurch - 3 John 9-15 - 6 Marks of a Faithful Church - Part 2

This morning we are returning to our brief detour from Ephesians to look at what I've deemed 6 marks of a faithful church. These are not the only things a church should be known for, but I think the traits we see in this little book are traits any faithful church would do well to aspire to. Many of these we do well as a church, but as Paul says in Philippians; keep doing these more and more.

We saw the first 3 last week:

1) Genuine concern for others. This letter is written from the apostle John to Gaius, who leads this church. And John makes it clear he loves this guy, he's praying for his soul and his health - he really has genuine concern. And we should have genuine concern for one another as well.

2) Commitment to the truth. Over and over throughout not only this letter, but 2 John and 1 John, the apostle is committed to the truth of the gospel, the truth of the Word of God. In fact his highest joy is knowing other people are walking according to the truth. **Read 4**

3) Generous to Christian Strangers. This church was a blessing to believers who were simply passing through. There would be no long term relationships, no long lasting connections. But Gaius's church was generous nonetheless because these are brothers and sisters in the Lord doing the work of the Kingdom. And we should be kind and generous to Christians as well.

This morning we look at the second half of the letter and the final 3 marks.

4) A Faithful church confronts ungodliness in the congregation. **Read 9-10**

So this seems to be the real reason for the letter. This is the crux of the whole matter: there's a guy in Gaius's church who is trying to take power over the whole congregation. He's saying he's in power, he's in control and all decisions, all truth comes through him.

This is the beginning of a cult. Sadly this kind of behavior is common in churches where there is a power struggle. Notice in these 2 verses the list of all the things Diotrephes does.

A - He puts himself first. **Read 9**

He has self appointed himself king. He's the head, he's in charge. No one can tell him what to do. The root of basically all sin is pride, arrogance. He knows best, he is the final measure of truth and authority. He can do no wrong, everyone else is deceived.

In fact, he knows better than the apostle John. **Read 9**

That's pretty crazy. Now, we know that the apostles weren't perfect. Remember when Paul had to rebuke Peter and Barnabas for basically abandoning the gospel in **Gal. 2?** We'll look at that in a bit. Being an apostle didn't mean perfection.

But when an apostle sends you a letter and you don't stop to think maybe you're in the wrong, that's pretty arrogant. John wrote to the church and Diotrephes was like "Nah, I know better than John." That's some pride right there.

By the way, just to hit the obvious: we're not missing any letters in the Bible. We're not missing any books. Every once in a while you'll get people claiming we're missing books and there's a big cover up and conspiracy because Christians didn't include some heretical gospel or some gnostic letter. That's not true.

We've known since the apostolic age that there are plenty of letters that the apostles wrote back and forth to churches. In the Corinthian letters it seems clear that there are at least 2 other letters from Paul to the

Corinthians we don't have. John mentions other letters. Even in reading the NT letters it's clear that there is ongoing back and forth communication between apostles and churches.

But just because an apostle wrote something down and we don't have it, doesn't mean it was missing from the Bible.

There were crackpots in ancient times, just like there are now and just because they wrote some fiction about the Bible or Bible characters doesn't mean it should be included.

Even good letters aren't included. The Didache, the letters of Clement, and other church fathers. The church from the earliest days recognized which letters were divinely inspired. What we have in the Bible are for sure the 66 books God has given us.

But nevertheless, when an apostle writes you a letter, you'd do well to listen. If I were living in ancient times and the apostle Matthew sent me an email about something I'd probably pause and think about what he was saying.

The same is true with us by the way. There are no more apostles, but if you have an older man or woman in the faith who's telling you something, even if you don't like it, you would do well to pause and consider it carefully.

So Diotrephes puts himself first.

B - He doesn't acknowledge legitimate authority. **Read 9**

The apostles had authority over the churches. That's part of what being an apostle was: cart blanche authority over the church. And Diotrephes disregarded it. He was the supreme leader, supreme authority. This is one of the most dangerous aspects anyone can have: that they are above all authority. That they are accountable to no one. Well, they'll say they're accountable to God. But no human authority has any hold on them.

Jude, talking about false teachers in **Vs. 8 Read**

This is the dead giveaway of false teachers: the reject authority. They hate it, despise, and don't acknowledge it. They are supreme and can't be trumped for any reason. Authorities are great when the authorities agree with them. But not when they are put in check.

Look at 2 Pet. 2:9-20 Read

Same thing. The dead giveaway of a false teacher is defiling passion - usually sexual sin - and despising authority.

I'm not talking about rejecting illegitimate authority. There are times to reject ungodly authority. No, I'm talking about a general disposition and hatred for any authority in your life. You don't like any government for any reason.

Maybe you're suspicious of all church leaders because you've seen enough bad ones over the course of your life. You don't like any elder for any reason. I've met guys who are okay with me preaching generic things, but the minute I admonish them to do something in their life they reject it as some kind of authoritarian power grab.

You won't submit ever to your husband because you don't think he's worthy of that. He's made some bad calls and you have to look out for yourself. Maybe you generally despise your parents because you think you know better.

It's a rejection of legitimate authority. And some people try to justify it because authorities are sinful or imperfect. Of course they are - we all are. But God has built them into our lives.

In fact, God has designed authorities into our lives on all levels. Paul Tripp says the first most basic thing we teach our kids in infancy is that they are under authority. Parental authority, government authority, church authority.

Those who despise authority despise how God has designed the world.

Puts himself first, doesn't acknowledge authority.

C - Slander good men. **Read 3 John 10**

Diotrephes is talking wicked nonsense. He's slandering John and the apostolic group. He's not making biblical arguments for why they're wrong. This isn't a difference in interpretation on end times or predestination or whatever.

What he's saying about the apostle is wicked - it's evil. And it's nonsense. It's not true. There is no proof, there are no receipts. The NIV says gossip. It's untrue, unsubstantiated claims meant to damage someone's reputation.

One of the reasons slander is so vile is because it's hard to undo the claim in someone's mind.

So take someone you love, and then someone else falsely accuses them of abuse or wrongdoing. Even if it's a lie on the face, it's hard to put that out of your mind. Even if that person later says their claim was a total lie, it's hard to put out of your mind.

That's why **Prov 10:18** says whoever utters slander is a fool.

We have to be very careful what we say about others. And we have to be very careful when we hear others speaking ill of others. We have put that stuff to death. We have confront it.

D - Refuses to greet Christians. **Read 10**

This is crazy, the one thing we should do in life is to greet other brothers in the Lord. We're commanded to greet each other, to love each other. Even to greet one another with a holy kiss.

This is not always easy depending on your history with other brothers, but it is necessary. We're family after all.

And welcome here means to bring into the congregation. To treat kindly. All the things Gaius was doing to be hospitable to traveling Christians, Diotrephes was doing the opposite. He was refusing to welcome them into the congregation, refusing to welcome them into fellowship.

It'd be like if a group of guys from Faith Bible or Fourth Memorial came to hang out with us some Sunday and there was someone in the parking lot turning them away.

But Diotrephes is going a step further: he's not just refusing the visitors, he's refusing those who want to be hospitable to the visitors. **Read 10**

So if you or I want to greet the visitors, he's putting us out of the church. He's doing unilateral church discipline because people want to be kind to Christian strangers.

This guy is a maniac. A pride filled, egotistical maniac who has somehow gained control of many in the church.

Let me just pause here, because we've probably all been involved in people trying to take over churches or destroy the elder board. People who create factions and divisions. Let me just say, this isn't a modern thing. This isn't an American thing. This is a spiritual thing. A demonic spiritual thing.

Factions and divisions are nothing new. If you've been through a church split or a couple of church splits you've seen this. You've seen bad leadership, seen guys in hard spots.

This week alone I was talking to a guy run out of his church because of hostile leaders. And I also had a great conversation with the guy who replaced him a couple years later who's trying to pick up the pieces.

Life in the church is hard and complicated. A little sin can destroy the whole thing, or as Paul says a little leaven does what? Leaven's the whole lump.

So what does John say he's going to do? He's going to confront him. **Read 9-10**

Diotrephes is a menace. He's a congregation's worst nightmare. He openly mocks all authority and tries to exert authority. John says if I show up, the very first order of business is confronting Diotrephes.

A mark of a faithful church is confronting ungodliness in the congregation. Especially of those in charge. No one likes to do that. Or if you do there's something probably a little wrong with you.

Not too many people gravitate toward confrontation and difficulty. Especially when you hope other people take care of it.

Over the years I've bought and sold a lot of things on Marketplace or Craigslist. And if I'm buying something - unless it's a killer deal - I'll almost always ask if they'll take less. Now some of you cringe even thinking about asking that question. Some of you don't ever want to hear that question. And I would venture that for many it's because you just don't want conflict. It's awkward and weird and what if there's tension?

For many, if we're just honest it's fear of man. And that boils over into every area of life, including confronting sin. If we're honest, we're just afraid of the conflict. And we can't be. Ungodliness in the congregation will destroy the congregation. **Turn to Gal 1** for a minute.

Galatia was not a city, it was a geographical area. And the Christians in the Galatian area were falling back into Judaism. Law Keeping, Circumcision, into thinking that physical descent - being born a Jew - somehow made someone more special than someone who simply had faith in Jesus. That's a denial the gospel.

And Paul confronts it. **Read 1:6-9**

Those are some pretty hard words aren't they? Twice he says if you are dabbling with another gospel - there's not another, but if you claim there's another - then you are accursed.

This is the opening to his letter. "Hi, this is Paul apostle, you're going to hell if you abandon the gospel of Jesus Christ." That's quite the opening. Why does he have this courage? **Read 10**

Listen, if your goal in life is to please men, you will not be able to please God. Because you have to be able to say things and do things that please God even if it makes the whole congregation angry.

You can't be a servant of Christ if you're a slave to pleasing man. Man-pleasing, man-fearing is the antithesis of the gospel.

And we all struggle with this on different levels. We like it when people like us. How do we overcome it? We overcome it with conviction.

What does Proverbs say is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge? The Fear of God. You have to fear God first and foremost and in absolute way and only then will your life be lived righteously.

Psalms 56:11: In God I trust, I shall not be afraid, what can man do to me?

Courage comes from conviction that God is trustworthy. He will keep us as safe as he needs us to be kept when we obey him.

What can man do to you? Insult you. Shun you. Slander you. Physically harm you. Take your job away. Turn your friends against you. Kill you.

But that's all.

Jesus says: Do not fear him who can kill the body and after that there's nothing more they can do. No, I will warn you - warn you - who to fear. Fear him who after he has killed has the authority to cast into hell. **Luke 12:4-7**

All people can do is kill us. That's where their power stops. But we believe in an eternal omnipotent authoritative judge who will bring every deed into account.

Psalms 118:6: The Lord is on my side, I will not fear, what can man do to me?

Hebrews 13:6 So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?"

If you fear man, you really need to memorize these passages. Because the gospel and your good are at stake. If you pull punches about truth and confronting sin, the gospel is at stake.

The gospel was at stake in Galatia - so Paul confronted. It was also at stake in Antioch - you know what Paul did? He confronted it. **Read 2:11-14**

What's going on here? It appears that the apostles Peter and Barnabas were enjoying their freedom in Christ and probably eating "unclean food" with the Gentiles, which is fine. All foods are clean now. But then some guys from James in Jerusalem - the Jewish Christians who probably still kept kosher - were coming and Peter and Barnabas reacted. Did you see what their reaction was in **Vs. 12? Read**

They were filled with fear and so the gospel was in jeopardy. This is Peter - the apostle Peter. And the apostle Barnabas. These 2 stalwarts of the gospel are prone to fear man so much that they functionally deny the gospel.

Beloved if they are prone to fear man and deny the gospel, so are we. And we need to be honest with this. It's Paul who only feared God who confronts them. In front of the whole crowd.

Listen, God calls us to confront ungodliness. Gently, graciously, patiently. All according to **Matthew 18** and **Titus 3**. But confront. And the biggest hindrance is fear.

Ironically the remedy is also fear - fear of God. **Turn back to 3 John. Read 10**

If John comes he's going to confront. He's not going to delay. He's going to grab bull by the horns because that's needed to keep the church pure.

We don't know what the outcome of this confrontation was, but we know the intention. We too must confront ungodliness.

Faithful church has concern for others, commitment to the truth, generous to strangers, confronts ungodliness.

5) Welcomes and imitate godly leaders. **Read 11-12**

So putting some pieces together it seems like what's happened here is that John sent a guy named Demetrius to Gaius's church. And Demetrius may have just been passing through. But Demetrius was ran off by Diotrephes and John heard about it. So John's sending him back and reaffirming his good testimony about Demetrius.

And he makes an interesting connection with this command. **Vs. 11-12 Read**

What's he getting at?

Don't imitate evil. Who's being evil here? Diotrephes. Don't imitate him. He's evil, he's conduct proves he's never seen God. He's not a believer.

Imitate what is good. Demetrius is good. Demetrius has been held up as a model of truth and a companion in the Kingdom. Just like most everyone loves Gaius, most everyone loves Demetrius. Listen to him, follow him. The apostle John himself is saying he's a good guy - that's pretty powerful.

Listen, brothers and sisters, find good people in the congregation to imitate. Welcome them, invite into your life. Ask to be discipled by them and learn from them.

And also know that we are part of a church planting network of great churches. There's good brothers who serve faithfully all over this area. We should welcome them and imitate them.

We're part of the INC - Inland Northwest Cooperative - a church planting ministry in the Inland Northwest and we talking about how we can collaborate more as congregations. Doing conferences together, planting churches together, filling each others pulpits if necessary, revitalizing churches.

We should be open to that, welcome them and encourage that kind of collaboration together. So we welcome and imitate godly leaders.

6) Encourage personal fellowship. **Read 13-16**

John the consummate preacher: there's always so much more to say and not enough time to say it. He had written a letter, but it didn't get through. He writes this letter as a quick encouragement but there's so much more to say.

But here's what I think is key. He says I could write more, but I want see you face to face. Or literally mouth to mouth. In person, close together. He longs for personal fellowship. Meeting them in person.

I was listening to a biography of John Adams a few weeks ago and toward the end of his life he and Thomas Jefferson became friends. They had been close friends, then bitter enemies, then as they got old they were friends again and wrote letters back and forth in their dying years.

And in the letters theres always a sense of longing to see each other or other men who were critical in founding. It's one thing to write, it's another thing to see each other and be in the presence of someone.

I often encourage people to not text each other or email each other. Just come over and have a cup of coffee or a meal. It's just nice to see people.

I know I sound like your grandma or grandpa who's like "It's just nice to see you" but brothers, we should long to see each other face to face. It's a good thing. Meet up regularly, just drop in on people - we all know the house is messy - just meet.

I don't care if you're an introvert. That's not even a biblical category. You don't get a pass on relationships.

We're called to: serve one another, encourage one another, bear each others burdens, live in harmony, submit to one another, so on. That means being with each other.

We don't need a bunch of programs for that to happen. That can just happen by inviting yourself into each other's lives.

James doesn't say true religion sends text messages to orphans and widows. He says visits.

Hebrews says have compassion on those in prison - believers who are persecuted and thrown in prison. How do you have compassion? In ancient times it was to support them financially and go be there with them.

Our church a lot of these things well. We just have to remember to do them and keep getting better.

We have to remember to we have to be intentional to have concern for others, we have to be intentional to stand for the truth. To be generous and all the rest.

But I think this is the way RBC will shine like the city on a hill we're supposed to be. How we'll build ourselves up in the faith and be a blessing to those who are just passing by.

Pray