

# 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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## UNNECESSARY BAGGAGE

by Roelf L. Ruffner

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, lie any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1-2).*

Christians often carry around with them unnecessary intellectual, emotional and even religious baggage. We should not be shocked by this because we live in a messed up, sinful world. False doctrine, denominational dogma and **prejudices** can rub off on us. The Christian should seek to rid himself of all this baggage and return to the Bible.

One common refrain you hear from religious people in this world is, “Well, you know that we are all just sinners.” **But are we?**

The term “sin” in the New Testament literally means “to miss the mark” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*) of God’s law (compare with 1 John 3:4), like an arrow missing its target. “Sinner” does refer to the one who has sinned. But often the term is used to describe one with a habit or life of sinning. He continues to miss the mark over and over again. **Consider the following passages:**

*“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).*

*“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18).*

Notice the phrases I have underlined in the preceding passages. All denote that sinning is not the current condition of the Christian. They “were servants of sin” but now, after obeying

the gospel of Christ, they have been “made free from sin;” no longer habitual practitioners of sin because they “BECAME servants of righteousness.”

Does this mean that a Christian is incapable of sinning or being a sinner? **No!** Christians can find themselves “sinners” in the sense of falling into the old rut of sinning. James wrote these words to Christians: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19,20). Thankfully, the Christian can repent, pray to the Father through the Son (our “advocate”—1 John 2:1) and ask forgiveness of their sins. **What a great blessing!**

Where did this **unscriptural** view of sin and sinning come from? It originated with the pagan Greek philosophy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that material things, like the human body, were inherently evil. The theologian Augustine used this idea to come up with his doctrine of Original Sin. He said that all people are sinners because of Adam’s sin which we inherited, along with the sins of our ancestors. The reformer John Calvin used this false concept to come up with his doctrine of Total Hereditary Depravity. He taught that we are all born depraved and so sinners. This means that that precious **newborn baby** is a sinner! Can you imagine a more pernicious false doctrine? Yet multiplied millions of people accept this as a fact. So was born the idea that “we are all just sinners,” which has become embedded in popular religious discourse.

**The Bible teaches no such**

**doctrine.** Neither you nor I was born a sinner (Ezekiel 18:20). We are free moral agents and must choose to sin or not to sin. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15-16). Obedience to the gospel of God’s grace frees us from the bondage of sin so we might become free in Christ to do God’s will.

But some object and say, “Didn’t Paul describe himself as chief of sinners?” (compare with 1 Timothy 1:15). Yes he did. But Paul was describing his former life as a persecutor of the church of Christ, in rebellion against God’s will, not his current spiritual state as a servant of Christ. He was no longer a sinner in the sense of one who was in a life of sin. He had been **forgiven** of all that. He was now a “new man” in Christ (Colossians 3:10); cleansed by the blood of Christ of his past habit of sin.

Dear reader, are you a sinner? If you have not obeyed the gospel you are one, however “good” or “spiritual” you think you are (compare with Matthew 7:21). If you have become a Christian and have since gotten out of fellowship with Jesus and His brethren, back into the rut of sin; **you are a sinner.** You need to repent and ask God and your brethren’s forgiveness. But if you are a faithful Christian, still striving to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7); the Bible says that you are NOT a sinner.

My friends, let us give up any misconceptions, false doctrine and misunderstandings we have and replace them with the pure, unadulterated **Truth** from the Bible “*which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32).

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## MODERN MANIFESTATIONS OF DIOTREPHESES

Part Two  
by Lee Moses

*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephe, 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).*

With these words, the apostle John warned Gaius, the well-beloved walker in truth, of Diotrephe, a self-serving scourge of the church. Although Diotrephe has long passed from this world, his mindset and works unfortunately have not. Many “Diotrephe” continue to manifest themselves in the world and even in the church. As noted in last month’s *FCGN*, Diotrephe’s selfish ambition and disregard for apostolic authority remain easily enough found. And there are several other modern manifestations of Diotrephe to

observe and guard against.

**Evil Speaking**

Among the denounced deeds of Diotrephe, John mentioned “*prating against us with malicious words.*” As Diotrephe spoke this way, he would “indulge in utterance that [made] no sense”—he was making baseless accusations. Evil speaking is a means to an end for some—to help get their way, they speak evil of others. Those who think they belong in first place will often try to get there by putting others down a place or two.

Others may not be so conniving in their motives, yet their evil speaking of others can be just as destructive. Perhaps they are simply bitter. Perhaps others have hurt them. If so, the New Testament provides recourse for personal offenses; and the first step is “*go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone*” (Matthew 18:15, emphasis LM). To rebuke a brother or sister privately for a personal offense is not harsh, but is rather the loving response (compare with Leviticus 19:17; Luke 17:3-4). There is an apropos poem by an unknown author that addresses this:

**TELL HIM GENTLY**

Has your brother sinned against you?  
Is the fault one he has known?  
Jesus tells you to go to him.  
Tell him gently - all alone!

It may be he will not hear you,  
And repentance may postpone;  
Yet, before you talk to others,  
Tell him gently - all alone!

Telling others is forbidden,  
Till in private you have shown  
To the man his sin against you;  
Tell him gently - all alone!

How much hurt results from gossip!  
By this habit strife is shown;  
Rather, since you love your brother,  
Tell him gently - all alone!

Negative speaking does not always equate to evil speaking. Rebuke is necessary. The ideal goal of rebuke is that one might “gain his brother.” And there comes a time when **public** rebuke is necessary (compare with Matthew 18:16-18). False teachers must be “marked” and “noted,” in order that otherwise unsuspecting brethren may be forewarned (Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). As John warned against Diotrephe, he certainly spoke **negatively** of him, but this does not mean that he spoke **evilly** of him. John said things

that **had to be said**.

However, sometimes Christians say things against their brethren that plainly do not need to be said. Such talk serves no constructive purpose. It hurts the brethren of whom they speak, and unnecessarily offends others. Far too many people have been driven away from the Lord’s church by hearing Christians speaking evilly of one another. And such talk simply does not characterize a “new creature in Christ,” but rather “*the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*” (Ephesians 4:22). Therefore,

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (verses 29-32).*

**Refusal to Support Worthy Works**

What John had already mentioned about Diotrephe should have been sufficient to describe a lousy excuse for a Christian. But what John had mentioned to this point was not enough for Diotrephe: “*And not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren.*”

These “brethren” to whom John refers were engaged in a worthy work, and were worthy themselves. They went forth and labored for the greatest cause—“*for his name’s sake*” (3 John 7). They refused to receive support from non-Christians (verse 7). By welcoming and providing for the needs of such brethren, other Christians could become “*fellowhelpers to the truth*” (verse 8)—thus, those who failed to do so were not and could not be considered fellowhelpers to the truth (compare with Matthew 12:30). But if one would “*bring them forward on their journey<sup>2</sup> after a godly sort, [he would] do well*” (3 John 6). There are far too many worthy brethren engaged in worthy works today, who clearly are not being “brought forward on their journey after a godly sort.”

Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to distinguish between a worthy work and an unworthy work. While worthy works should be supported, unworthy works must not. Jesus would not have helped the Pharisees with their prosely-

tizing, nor would He have encouraged others to do so; as He denounced, “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves*” (Matthew 23:15). The scribes and Pharisees hindered the salvation of others, and brought woe upon themselves for engaging in this unworthy work. There are works that endanger souls of others, and **there are works to which one cannot lend aid and remain blameless** (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 10-11).

A worthy work will not violate the Scriptural mission and organization of the church. God has given the church a mission, and no church may delegate its mission to another entity. Churches may certainly cooperate with each other. Cooperation between churches is not only optional; at times it is **necessary** to accomplish the monumental task given the Lord’s body. However, the church must do its own work, leaving the home and businesses to accomplish their own work.

A worthy work teaches sound, “uncorrupt” doctrine, and only utilizes men characterized by “*sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*” (Titus 2:7-8). If such sound men and doctrine characterize a work, anyone who would attempt to speak evil of it should be ashamed. However, what should one do if the opposite characterizes a work? What Paul wrote to Titus implies that unsound speech **should** be condemned, and that those who oppose it have **nothing** about which to be ashamed. If a work is bringing “strange and uncertain sounds” to the brotherhood, how can anyone describe such as work as “worthy”?

The Lord’s church is to continue the Lord’s work of “seeking and saving the lost” and the apostles’ work of “going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to every creature” (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15). Accompanied by “doing good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10) and laboring to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28-29), this is the work of the church—and it is most worthy. Elders are to expedite the work of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Corinthians 10:23). Yet Diotrephes, apparently an elder of the Lord’s church, stopped a good work of the Lord from going forward.

Diotrephes refused to help “the brethren” because he wanted to be first. Many churches today refuse to assist worthy works because of the “me first”

syndrome as well. While the church is to have **love** as its primary motive (1 Corinthians 16:14; compare with 13:1-3), many churches and brethren are governed by stinginess and materialism. Many worthy works do not have the financial support they need. There are “missionaries” who are forced to give up their mission. Yet churches who claim they cannot help are building themselves multi-million dollar facilities, all too often with much of those facilities devoted to recreational activities—**not remotely** a work of the church. Other elderships stubbornly sit on their treasuries, hoarding up tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars, refusing to allow out an occasional few hundred dollars that could provide vital assistance to a worthy work. If many of today’s elders would have received Paul’s vision of the Macedonian man saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9), they would have responded, “Sorry—we have our own problems to take care of.” This is a most unfortunate modern manifestation of Diotrephes.

#### Unfriendliness and Inhospitability

Those who have devoted their lives to sowing the Gospel seed in strange and distant lands should be received as royalty. While Diotrephes’ failure to “*receive the brethren*” demonstrates a failure to support worthy missionaries, it also demonstrates a severe lack of Christian hospitality. The “*brethren*” of whom John spoke were not only John’s brethren, they were not only Gaius’ brethren—they were Diotrephes’ brethren.

Christians are “*members one of another*” and they are brethren of one another. When Christians can say, “*We be brethren*,” it follows that they will treat each other in a manner becoming brethren (Genesis 13:8; compare with Romans 12:10; 1 John 4:20). When members of a church have a visitor in attendance from another congregation, those members should respond to that visitor just as they would a long-lost brother or sister they had never met. They would want to get to know that person well, and kindle a long-lasting relationship. However, some at least outwardly reflect the attitude, “What are you doing at **my** church?” That may not be their thinking. Some Christians are more extroverted than others are. Regardless, inhospitability is inexcusable, and Christians should seek to develop hospitality.

Common friendliness and Christian hospitality should characterize our

demeanor and our lives. Of course, an elder who is not wholly “*given to hospitality*” is not a Scripturally qualified elder at all, and should step down or be removed immediately (1 Timothy 3:2). But if our love is to be “*without dissimulation*,” or “*without hypocrisy*” (American Standard Version), we must **all** be “*given to hospitality*” (Romans 12:9, 13). God commands that we show hospitality, particularly to those who may not be able to return the favor (Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9; Luke 14:12-14). On the Judgment Day, some will hear as their condemnation, “*I was a stranger, and ye took me not in. . . . Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me*” (Matthew 25:43, 45). To fail herein is to manifest the condemned spirit of Diotrephes.

#### Misuse of Authority

Diotrephes went beyond refusing to receive the “*brethren*” himself. John said Diotrephes “*forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church*.” The Holy Spirit had bestowed Diotrephes’ eldership with authority to oversee the feeding of the flock, as the Holy Spirit does all Scriptural elderships (Acts 20:28). However, Diotrephes went beyond his Divinely-given authority, and used that which he had been given with inappropriate motivations. No man has the power to sever faithful branches from the vine of Christ (John 15:5-10), and certainly no Christian should ever **desire** to do so—yet Diotrephes purported to do just that. There are numerous ways authority has likewise been abused in modern times.

Sadly, there have been church leaders who have used their authority to embezzle church funds. Others have taken advantage of unsuspecting young people sexually. Others, given a simple position as a Bible class teacher, assume authority as a “discipling leader” to lead their students after them in a cultic fashion. Other times, one elder will make decisions for the congregation, when it is the task of the collective eldership to make those decisions.

Other misuses of authority can be found under the umbrella of anti-ism. As Franklin Camp said, “Anti-ism exalts matters of expediency to the realm of matters of faith.” Some congregations choose not to support orphans’ homes. I suppose that is their prerogative, as long as they continue to practice “*pure religion and undefiled*” to the best of their abilities (James 1:27). However, when they decide to “forbid them that would, and cast them out of the church,” we have problems. A

church has the right to give benevolent assistance to orphans and other needy children, regardless of the nature of the home in which the children live (Galatians 6:10).

Some congregations prefer to send their financial support directly to each missionary they support, as opposed to sending it to another church. Again, they have the prerogative to do so, even though there are some potential dangers in sending funds directly to missionaries (compare with 2 Corinthians 8:18-21). But when they forbid congregations from sending funds to other churches, they prohibit the church from supporting works as it supported the apostle Paul. Paul received financial support from a plurality of "churches" (2 Corinthians 11:8). Yet writing of the same period of time, he told the Philippians, "[N]o church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only" (Philippians 4:15). The terms Paul uses for "giving" and "receiving" were common accounting terms for "debit" and "credit."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Philippian church was **receiving** funds for Paul's work just as it was **distributing** funds to the work. The evident source from which the Philippian church received these funds was the remainder of the "churches" spoken of in Second Corinthians 11:8.

Regardless of how it is done, it is shameful when brethren, or any who purports to be religious, misuses authority.

**CONCLUSION**

Diotrephes' attitude and action threatened significant harm to the church in the first century. There remain many modern manifestations of Diotrephes, as there are still many who "love the preeminence." Even if we do not necessarily have the self-seeking mindset of Diotrephes, we can still manifest various "Diotrephisms" that harm the church. Perhaps the motivation is different from that of Diotrephes, but the fruit is the same. We must guard ourselves against modern manifestations of Diotrephes, whether such can be found in ourselves or in others.

<sup>1</sup> *Phluareoo*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1060.

<sup>2</sup> "To assist someone in making a journey, send on one's way with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc." *Propempoo*, Bauer, et al., p. 873.

<sup>3</sup> *Dosis*, Bauer, et al., p. 259.

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**GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP**

**- COLOSSIANS 3:17**

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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