

On Being a Leader

by
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“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. . . . I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words, and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church. . . .” (3 John 1-14).

EVERYONE likes to have a good influence on others. But some people say they do not really want to be leaders. They make such statements because they have misunderstood the real meaning of leadership. Being a leader involves more than leading the singing, leading a prayer, or being an elder or a deacon. There is much more to leadership than filling one of these roles. In fact, there may be those who are better leaders than the ones who lead in a formal way. They influence other people for Christianity by guiding and helping them during their day-to-day relationships.

Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). He also said to the Colossians, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude” (Colossians 2:6, 7). Being an influence for Christ is the challenge and goal of every Christian. But how do we go about reaching this goal?

Sometimes it seems that leadership has one thing in common with happiness. The peculiar truth about happiness is, the harder we try to be happy, the less happiness there is. The happiest people in the world are people who are not concerned about being happy. These people are concerned about doing what is right, helping others, and going about their business. In this

process, they find happiness. Those who seek happiness are usually the most miserable people.

Sometimes leadership and influence for Christ is a serendipity. When we consciously say, “I am going to be a leader and influence somebody for Christ,” we seem to do the least good. The people who make the greatest leaders are those who just go about doing their job.

When I was an undergraduate student at Abilene Christian University, several young men were learning to be preachers. They were gifted young men with tremendous abilities. There were also several around who did not have much ability. They only knew how to work hard. Many of those young men who were so talented, capable, and intelligent are not preaching the gospel today. Some are not even faithful Christians. If we set our goal on influencing others and becoming leaders, we may not reach that goal. But if we set out to follow Christ and do what is right, we may develop into the kind of leaders that God wants in the church and family.

I. GAIUS

In 3 John, we find a contrast between two men which exemplifies this truth. One man was a friend of Paul’s. The letter is written to the well-beloved Gaius. John mentions in his introduction (1-3) that he prayed for Gaius and rejoiced for Gaius because he worked in the truth. In verses 5 through 8, he tells why he is so thankful for men like Gaius. Verse 5 says, “Beloved, thou

doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers.”

Verse 6 has a phrase in it that is hard to catch in our modern English: “And they bear witness to your love before the church.” He is saying that the people he helped bear witness that he helped them. He continues in verse 6 by saying, “. . . and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.” “To send them on their way” is a colloquial expression in the Greek language. He is saying: When these people go on their preaching journey, help them do it. Do what it takes to help them do it. The implication in this verse is that Gaius had done something for others, on his own, in his own quiet way. The brethren are the ones who made it known. John says to keep on serving others, “for they went out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth” (7, 8). We do not want those who go out to depend on the world. He says, “Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth” (8). Leadership and influence for the church is not the same as being “bossy.” Anyone can be bossy. But Christian leadership requires something more. Christian leadership is the attitude that we are fellow helpers, and workers together. We get people to serve because we let them know we are on their team—we are going to work with them and give them our support.

Preachers know how important it is for people to support their preaching. It is also important for the Bible class teacher to have support. If you want to have influence, this is the way to go about it. That was the kind of person Gaius was.

II. DIOTREPES

There was a contemporary of Gaius who was so notorious that his name has become a byword. When an elder tries to “run the whole show” or a preacher tries to lord it over the elders, someone will say, “He’s a regular Diotrepes.” The way Diotrepes exerted his influence was completely different from Gaius. John said, “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrepes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say” (9). Diotrepes

would not listen to them because he wanted to be the “leader.”

I have seen some young preachers who rose to prominence too early in their lives. Now they do not preach. They were not mature enough to handle the responsibility. The way to become a leader is to give yourself to others. You become a leader through service.

John says, “For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does” (10). John was a very loving and kind person, but he would never compromise. He says he will remember what Diotrepes has done and will put him in his place for the sake of the church. He says, “. . . unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church” (10). Diotrepes was not satisfied with just opposing the other Christians; he wanted to kick out those who listened to them.

John makes this remark before concluding his epistle: “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God” (11). This principle is true in every age. Follow good, and do not be concerned about what others are doing. If something is good and you are the only one who does it, go ahead and do it. If the deed is evil and everyone else is partaking in it, leave it alone. That is the secret of living the Christian life. The Christian must always be trying to do right.

John says, “You know that our witness is true” (12). If you want to use your influence, use it for good. Then he concludes, “I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” (13, 14).

CONCLUSION

John was concerned about spiritual growth. We need to model our lives after men like Gaius—men who are interested in doing right and using their influence for Christ.

Not all Christians become elders or deacons. But every faithful Christian becomes a leader to some extent. Someone will be looking to you for an example. Live like Gaius by quietly doing what God wants you to do.

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