

## ***Holding a Church Hostage***

*"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to do, putting them out of the church." (3 John 9,10)*

The daily news tells us of numerous hostage situations - some at home, some abroad. A few zealots demanding that the world dance to their tune - or else.

Diotrephes was a spiritual terrorist who held the church where he was a member hostage. He loved preeminence. Somehow he gained the control of the church. The results are well known. He opposed the apostles. He refused to receive those sent by them. He used malicious words against them. He was not content with not receiving faithful brethren, he forbade others from doing so. If they did he put them out of the church. Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been a member of that church? Can you imagine the tension that must have existed? Brethren would almost be afraid to breathe for fear of crossing Diotrephes.

Not everyone who loves preeminence has the ability to gain control of the church like Diotrephes. One may not have enough power and support to put anyone out of the church. He is not qualified for real leadership or scriptural oversight. (If he were he would not love preeminence or be self-willed nor would he want the kind of power he now desires). He or she can still, to a great degree control the church by holding it hostage with an ungodly temperament. Other members live with the constant threat of trouble or embarrassment if his demands are not met. Often brethren will meet his demands to avoid the scene he can create.

In a business meeting several options (authorized under generic Scriptural authority) for doing the Lord's work may be discussed. Brethren try to decide which option is the most expedient for this time and place. It is obvious to all present that one method is likely the best choice for them. Obvious to all, that is, except Diotrephes, Jr. He must exercise his power of objection. If the method is not the one he suggested, no telling what he might do or say. He might threaten to go elsewhere. He knows no church likes losing a member. He might just sit back and take verbal pot shots at those who are working the option adopted by the brethren. He might just pout and dare anyone to try to involve him in the work.

A brother may unilaterally decide on a course of action for the church. He may be unable and/or unwilling to reasonably try to persuade the church of the validity of his judgment. He simply tells them what he thinks they ought to do or not do. He usually couples his demand with a threat - either stated or implied.

If something is his idea, then he will work his head off for it. If not, then he finds ways to hinder the work. If brethren want his cooperation and/or avoid trouble, then they had best follow his recommendations. All too often, brethren will give into his demands to avoid the hassle.

A favorite sport a few brethren is nit-picking. Legitimate constructive criticism, properly discussed with those who can help and be helped it, is good. This is not what I am talking about. Capable, but sensitive brethren are discouraged from preaching, teaching, leading singing or some other work that needs doing because of such nit pickers. They know the price they will have to pay. If one does accept a work, he is constantly aware that anything he says or does could be a target for the nitpicker. So, the work of the church is held hostage out a real fear of being picked apart by such characters.

Let us have more "fellow workers for the truth" (v. 8) and fewer like Diotrephes who seek attention and power - even if it means controlling the church by pettiness. The Bible does not teach that a congregation should be ruled by majority vote - nor, does it teach that it should be ruled the whims of some sorehead.

***- by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.***

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## ***Easy, Or Right?***

If a friend or family member is known to drink alcoholic beverages and then drive his or her car, would you say anything about this, preventing a disaster? Or, would you keep silent for fear of hurting their feelings?

If a friend or family member is harming and abusing a child, would you speak up about it, or would you keep silent because you didn't want the trouble it could bring to you?

If a friend or family member is teaching false doctrine which results in someone being led away from the truth (and thus, lost eternally) would you keep silent because it is the easier thing to do, or would you confront the false teacher and try to correct him?

If a friend or family member is making a spiritual choice which leads him or her into unfaithfulness, would you say something about this, or would you keep quiet because you fear the wrath of the erring brother or sister?

"Easy" is seldom "right," is it?

- by *Mark White*

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## ***Every Secret Thing***

In this age of modern media we have unprecedented opportunities to look at, listen to, and participate in evil things. And, with the rapid advance of technology, we can engage in these evil deeds with relative anonymity. In years gone by, if there was a desire to engage in these sordid and sinful activities, it was necessary to go out in public places to do so. Pornography was available, but only at newsstands and the like. Filthy movies were out there, but you had to go to the XXX movie house to see them. No more! A person can sit in front of his computer screen and quickly access (via the Internet) all manner of pornography -- and no one can see him do it. "Chat rooms" allow perverted persons the ability to openly discuss their twisted passions with total strangers -- and they are out of public view when doing so. With cable and satellite TV, it is possible to receive all manner of filthy programming -- and watch it right there in the privacy of your own home.

This new accessibility -- with anonymity -- has already served as a downfall to many, including not a few Christians. We all need to be on guard about this powerful temptation. Never forget that God in heaven sees and knows all that you think and do. Consider:

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13)

Are you engaged in things that you would not want others to find out about? If so, you should know two things. First, God already knows! And, secondly, in the final judgment everyone will know, for He will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5). Christian, be careful!

- by *Greg Gwin*