

Acting in the Spirit, Love and Humility

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

Introduction

- A. In this series, we want to take a look at a very important part of the eldership: handling conflict.
- B. There will be conflict in the eldership. It is a question of when it will happen and how we will handle it.
- C. We want to examine biblical attitudes and behaviors.

I. Act in the Spirit: When Facing Conflict, Do Not Display “the Works of the Flesh”

- A. Much of the contentious infighting and divisions that plague many elderships today is the result from believers acting according to the flesh and not walking by the Spirit.

- B. The conflict among the churches of Galatia

- 1. There was serious discord over the role of the Mosaic Law. So Paul, one of the founders of these churches, warned the new believers:

“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” (Gal. 5:15 ESV)

- 2. After Paul warns of the potential for mutual destruction within the believing community, he identifies the cause as “the works of the flesh”

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy . . .” (Gal. 5:19–21)

- 3. As you consider these eight “works of the flesh,” know this: The Holy Spirit is absolutely opposed to each of them.

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other.” (Gal. 5:17)

- 4. The Holy Spirit does not lead fellow elders to commit these sins: to bite and devour one another or to provoke one another to fits of anger or bitter jealousy.

- C. Sinful conflict in the church at Corinth

- 1. Christians in the church at Corinth also exhibited the sinful “works of the flesh” and experienced disruptive conflict.
 - 2. In fact, there was not another church founded by Paul, as far as we know, that was so plagued by sin and division and conflict.
 - 3. The Corinthian believers had the Holy Spirit, yet in behavior and attitude were like people who are devoid of the Spirit.
 - 4. Paul puts his finger on the problem.

"... you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not being merely human?" (1 Cor. 3:3-4)

D. This fleshly behavior can happen in an eldership, too!

1. If you want to try to destroy the eldership, intentionally or not, then just display the works of the flesh.

"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander . . ."
(1 Peter 2:1-3)

2. I think particularly of envy.
 - a) Envy is a sin that destroy the eldership.
 - b) King Saul and David: Initially Saul loved David, but almost immediately Saul became envious. Saul couldn't live in a world where he wasn't the best.
3. What about you?
 - a) Preachers can feel threatened by other gifted preachers.
 - b) Elders can envy fellow elders who shine brighter in leadership ability or knowledge.
 - c) Deacons can envy fellow deacons who serve more effectively or are sought out for help more frequently.
 - d) Churches can envy other churches that are larger or are growing rapidly.

E. Why do I mention all of these works of the flesh? If you don't address it, they will destroy the eldership and your assembly.

"Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." – John Owens

II. Act in the Spirit: When Facing Conflict, Display "the Fruit of the Spirit"

A. Walk by the Spirit

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . . But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."
(Gal. 5:16, 18, 25)

1. This passage is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament for instruction on how to live the Christian life and how to work with a group of elders.
2. It is, as one theologian says, "theological dynamite."
3. Nothing but the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to enable believers to resist the desires of the flesh and to live the Christ-like life.

B. Display the fruit of the Spirit.

1. One of the saddest most damaging things is out of control Christians. Somehow, in the heat of the moment people feel justified to say the nastiest things.
2. When people act according to the flesh, they are out-of-control emotionally.
3. They do not display the fruit of the Spirit and have the potential to do terrible damage to other people and to the name of Christ.

III. Act in the Spirit: When Facing Conflict, Display “the Wisdom From Above”

- A. First there is “the wisdom from above,” which is from God’s Spirit. It produces purity of heart and mind, sweet reasonableness, graciousness, mercy, sincerity, and peace (James 3:17).**
- B. Then there is the wisdom from below, which “is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” It produces uncontrolled speech, bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, unbridled passions, strife, pride, “disorder and every vile practice” (James 3:2–4:6).**

IV. Practical Application and Suggestions for Acting in the Spirit:

A. Pray.

1. As soon as you feel your blood start to boil . . . pray.
2. Elders meetings can be very difficult sometimes.
3. Prayer is essential to walking by the Spirit. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and moves us to confess and amend our ways.

B. Check our attitudes and conduct.

1. God does not lead his people to “bite and devour one another” like wild animals.
2. Does your behavior resemble biting and devouring?
3. Maybe you are self-unaware?

C. Seek counsel from other solid Spirit-filled believers.

D. Treat others with kindness and gentleness.

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:24–26)

E. Be humble and open to correction.

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Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 2

V. Act in Love: Love defines how to act when facing conflict.

A. When conflicts arises, we NEED to act out of love.

B. The Corinthians prided themselves on their knowledge and giftedness, but they were famous for their backbiting.

1. But they couldn't APPLY the biblical principles . . .
2. This is a huge problem.

C. Paul writes to the Corinthians that love is indispensable to all that they do and say (1 Cor. 13:1-3) and follows up with fifteen specific descriptions of love (vv. 4-7).

*"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."
(1 Cor. 13:4-7 ESV)*

1. After listing two positive qualities of love ("patient" and "kind"), Paul lists eight vices that are totally incompatible with love.
 - a) Each of these vices expresses sinful self-centeredness that creates and exacerbates conflict and tears apart relationships.
 - b) These sins are the work of the flesh; they dominated the church in Corinth, and they continue to generate conflict in churches and in the personal lives of Christians today.
2. Decide beforehand how you should respond toward those with whom you disagree.

VI. Act in Love: Love does not seek revenge for wrongs suffered.

Following Jesus' teaching and example, Paul and Peter prohibit this "get-even mentality" that is so much a part of human nature.

"Repay no one evil for evil." (Rom. 12:17)

"Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called." (1 Peter 3:9)

"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23)

VII. Act in Love: Love overcomes evil through prayer, forbearance, and kindness.

A. Prayer

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matt. 5:44)

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27–28)

B. Forbearance

"[We are to bear] with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive." (Col. 3:13)

C. Kindness

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:20–21)

VIII. Act in Love: Love covers a multitude of sins.

A. As elders, it's important to remember we are sinners, and need grace.

1. This helps us to guard against harboring bitterness.
2. There will be hurt feelings and issues of angst guaranteed. But love covers.

B. Although love covers a multitude of sins, it doesn't cover all sins.

C. As Ken Sande, the author of *The Peacemaker*, explains:

"To truly overlook an offense means to deliberately decide not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness. If you cannot let go of an offense in this way, if it is too serious to overlook, or if it continues as part of a pattern in the other person's life, then you will need to go and talk to the other person about it in a loving and constructive manner." – Ken Sande

IX. Acting in Humility

A. How can an eldership actually live in unity?

B. The Answer: Christ-like humility (Phil. 2:5–6, 8)

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5)

X. Act in Humility: Address wrong attitudes in the eldership.

A. Nobody likes a know-it-all, big shot who is always right.

B. Big shot syndrome is a real problem today.

C. For this reason, Paul admonishes everyone in the church:

"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit . . ." (Phil. 2:3)

D. Denounce the wrong attitude of selfish ambition.

1. The word "rivalry" in Philippians 2:3 could be better translated as "selfish ambition," meaning "selfish devotion to one's own interests" without regard for the interests of others or the cost to others.
2. Selfish ambition is a self-centered, contentious, competitive, and factious spirit.
 - a) Selfish ambition is not a fruit of the Spirit; it is a work of the flesh.
 - b) It undermines people who are trying to work together in unity.

E. Denounce the wrong attitude of conceit or pride.

Because the nature of pride is to think too highly of oneself, Paul warns:

"I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment." (Rom. 12:3)

"For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (Gal. 6:3)

"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5)

XI. Act in Humility: Model servanthood in the eldership.

A. Andrew Murray, the beloved devotional writer and missionary from South Africa, wrote:

"When I look back on my own religious experience, or on the Church of Christ in the world, I stand amazed at the thought of how little humility is sought after as the distinguishing feature of the discipleship of Jesus. In preaching and living, in the daily activities of the home and social life, in the more special fellowship with Christians, in the direction and performance of work for Christ—how much proof there is that humility is not esteemed the cardinal value." – Andrew Murray

What true and sad words! Humility is not sought after, and yet it ought to characterize the elder!

B. Paul's message in Philippians 2:3–5 is crystal clear:

"In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:3–5)

The Greek word translated as humility literally means "lowliness of mind," or "humble-mindedness."

C. Taking on the attitude of Christ

1. There is no more powerful statement in all of Scripture than this: "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
2. How can we be proud when Christ was humble? How can we selfishly serve ourselves when he unselfishly served others?
3. Or, as one notable theologian said, "How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?"
4. Jesus dramatically illustrated the humble servant attitude in the upper room before the last Passover meal. As the twelve disciples quarreled about who would be considered the greatest (Luke 22:24), Jesus—their master, teacher, and Lord—knelt down and washed their feet:
"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example..." (John 13: 14–15a)
5. Try to think of ways that you can wash the feet of your fellow elders!

Control Anger, the Tongue and Criticism

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

XII. Controlling the Anger

- A. Some elders today who would never curse, steal, miss a meeting, or think of getting drunk, respond with unrestrained anger toward those who disagree with them.**
 - 1. These Christians overreact.
 - 2. They malign their brothers.
 - 3. They slander the church.
 - 4. They feel perfectly justified in sending hate mail or in spreading venom via the internet or Facebook.
- B. The Bible calls this anger a “work of the flesh” (Gal. 5:17) and “loveless behavior” (1 Cor. 13:4–7).**
- C. One of the most important biblical principles for handling conflict constructively is to control the passions of anger.**
 - 1. Most disputes wouldn’t be nearly as unpleasant and unprofitable if people didn’t lose control of their tempers and say harsh and irrational things to one another.
 - 2. Unrestrained anger creates and escalates conflict.
 - 3. It makes problem solving and peacemaking far more difficult than it should be.

XIII. Controlling Anger: Be Slow to Anger

- A. God is slow to anger, and for that we should be eternally grateful.**
 - 1. God is longsuffering with us.
 - 2. Furthermore, God expects his children to be like him—as Paul says, to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1)—so we also must be slow to anger.
- B. Proverbs speaks to this topic a lot.**

“Whoever is slow to anger quiets contention.” (Prov. 15:18 ESV)

“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding.” (Prov. 14:29)
- C. In the midst of contention, only those who are slow to anger are able to bring peace.**
 - 1. Those who are slow to anger are more rational and objective than quick-tempered people.
 - 2. They possess the calm, cool demeanor that is needed to navigate through the storms of conflict.
 - 3. In contrast to the “calmness” of those who are slow to anger, “a hot-tempered man stirs up strife” (Prov. 15:18).

D. James says it well.

"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires." (James 1:19–20)

We are to be careful to listen to what others say, to be slow to speak our mind or express our opinions, and to be slow to express anger.

E. Too often, however, our pattern of behavior is the exact opposite.

When we are opposed or frustrated we are quick to express our anger, spout our own opinions, defend ourselves, and resist listening to others.

XIV. Controlling Anger: Control the Passions of Anger

A. Be angry, but do not sin.

1. Anger is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences.
2. It also is an emotion that God experiences.
3. His holy anger burns against evil (Ps. 7:11) yet always remains perfectly controlled and just. As God's children, we should feel the righteous indignation that he feels when we encounter gross injustice or blatant wickedness (Ps. 119:53).
4. The problem for those of us who follow in Jesus' footsteps is that righteous anger can quickly morph into sinful anger.
5. This is why the Scripture says: Be angry and do not sin. (Eph. 4:26)

B. Deal with anger promptly, and do not give the devil a helping hand.

"Nothing, I maintain, so constantly gives the devil an opportunity as loss of control in anger."
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The devil exploits masterfully the anger of believers to tempt them to sin. He loves nothing more than to stir up angry, shameful disputes among believing churches, families, and friends.

C. Be calm, and don't escalate conflict.

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

1. When you speak, answer gently.
2. Intentionally lower the volume of your voice and maintain a pleasant tone.
"A soft tongue will break a bone." (Prov. 25:15)
3. Love is "not easily angered" (1 Cor. 13:5 NIV). "A fool gives full vent to his spirit" declares Proverbs (Prov. 29:11).

XV. Controlling Anger: Strip Off the Old Life of Anger, and Put on the New Clothes of Christ-Like Character

A. Take off the old garments.

"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander . . . seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Col. 3:8–10 ESV)

1. Angry attitudes are part of the old, unregenerate lifestyle that has no place in the wardrobe of a new person in Christ.
2. As new creatures in Christ then, believers must strip off the dirty garments of the old self.
3. We must, as Paul admonishes, put away “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” (Eph. 4:31).
4. The story of one man who, through the power of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, found victory over anger:
 - a) “As a new Christian, I was challenged to apply my weekly Bible study personally. I was working through Colossians. The Holy Spirit caught my attention with Colossians 3:8: “But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.” I tried to slide past it, but he kept bringing me back to the words “get rid of anger.”
 - b) I had a violent temper. Whenever it flared, I’d haul up and bash my fist into the nearest door. Even though I often bloodied my knuckles and once completely smashed a beautiful diamond and onyx ring my wife had given me, I couldn’t seem to stop. Yet here was God’s Word: “Get rid of anger.” This wasn’t just advice given to the people of Colossae centuries ago. It was God speaking to me right then.
 - c) So I made a covenant with God to work on controlling anger. My first step was to memorize the verse and review it daily. I prayed and asked the Lord to bring this verse to mind whenever I might be tempted to lose my temper. I also asked my wife to pray for me and remind me of this verse if she saw me failing in my promise to the Lord. So Colossians 3:8 became a part of my life and gradually removed that sin from me.”
5. If you want to improve in this area, try this.
 - a) Stop and pray immediately when you sense sinful anger arising in your mind and body.
 - b) Remember that other people are watching how you respond to a provoking situation.
 - c) Don’t speak or act until you have control over your emotions.
 - d) If you do sin in anger, confess your sin and seek forgiveness immediately.

B. Put on the new clothes.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Col. 3:12–14)

1. Only when we are properly dressed in Christ-like character can we handle conflict properly or discuss reasonably and profitably our doctrinal differences or policy issues.
2. Story of Bishop Pike and Francis Schaffer:
 - a) Throughout the discussion, this young skeptic (Bishop Pike) did everything in his power to bait the apologist and disrupt the meeting, but the apologist remained calm and responded kindly, patiently, and gently (1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Tim. 2:24–26).

- b) At the end of the debate, impressed by the apologist's gracious demeanor, the young man asked to meet one-on-one to talk more about the faith. If Schaffer had lost control of his anger, he likely would have lost the opportunity to speak with this young man and would have negatively impacted the rest of the audience.

Control Anger, the Tongue and Criticism

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 2

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:29–30 ESV)

XVI. Controlling the Tongue: Bridle the Tongue

A. There is a great story told:

1. In a church history class the teacher stated that Constantine, the first emperor of Rome to profess and then legalize Christianity, was not a true, born-again believer. Constantine, the teacher said, used Christianity for political advantage (ca. AD 285–337).
2. One student disagreed with the teacher, insisting that Constantine was a true believer and a great leader in the history of Christianity. He became visibly upset and proceeded to attack the teacher verbally. The teacher, in turn, became angry and defensive. The exchange that ensued became so ugly and heated that the class was dismissed; teacher and student had to walk away from each other.
3. A week later, the teacher stated again that Constantine merely professed Christianity.
4. "Oh," the student exclaimed, "I thought you were talking about Augustine, not Constantine. I thought you said Augustine was not a true believer."
5. "No," the teacher said, "I was talking about Constantine, not Augustine."
6. "Well then," the student said, "I agree with you."

B. The whole conflict occurred because each misunderstood the other!

1. Neither one listened attentively and respectfully.
2. Neither one seemed to care about the impact of his words or controlling his tongue.

C. True spiritual godliness, in contrast, is demonstrated by bringing the tongue under control:

"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." (James 1:26)

XVII. Controlling the Tongue: Be Quick to Hear

A. In the words of James, we need to be "quick to hear" and "slow to speak" (James 1:19).

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." (Prov. 20:5)

B. A wise person considers the possibility that the other person may be right!

1. Not one of us thinks straight all of the time. When we are open to learning, our opponent may turn out to be our best teacher. So those who are wise seek to honestly understand the other person's arguments, reasoning, and position.

C. Ask questions.

1. It's amazing how little we listen and how much we overreact to those who disagree with us.
2. We immediately jump to justifying our position, defending our ego, and winning the argument.

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." (Prov. 18:13)

XVIII. Controlling the Tongue: Be Slow to Speak

A. "Slow to speak" – Slow to spout our opinions, slow to be the first to answer, slow to dominate a conversation, and slow to pronounce judgment.

B. Wisdom from King Solomon

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." (Prov. 10:19)

"Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble." (Prov. 21:23)

"Whoever restrains his words has knowledge." (Prov. 17:27)

"Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life." (Prov. 13:3)

"A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating." (Prov. 18:6)

C. Wise people benefit when they control their tongue. Fools, however, lack restraint, which leads to conflict.

XIX. Controlling the Tongue: Choose the Right Words

"A harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1)

A. We are not to respond to mean, nasty talk with more mean, nasty talk; we are not to return evil words for evil words.

B. When we are verbally attacked, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond with kindness and self-control (1 Cor. 4:12-13).

XX. Controlling the Tongue: Eliminate Cutting Words from Your Vocabulary

A. After years of experience in facing painful controversy, Francis Schaeffer makes this insightful comment regarding the power of cutting words:

"I have observed one thing among true Christians in their differences in many countries: what divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for twenty, thirty, or forty years. . . . Invariably it is lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue."

– Francis Schaeffer

B. Elders must be careful of the words they use and eliminate cutting words!

C. The Holy Spirit does not lead believers to make cruel, mean, nasty, or insulting comments.

1. This means that we do not refer to fellow believers with whom we disagree with such rude epithets as "losers," "idiots," "heretics," or "liberals."

2. To gain victory over a cutting tongue, eliminate from your daily vocabulary all unnecessary terms of disparagement—all words that belittle, mock, insult, or demean God's people.

"The battle for vocal holiness is a long-running one, and it needs to be waged incessantly, daily, hourly." – Sinclair Ferguson

XXI. Controlling the Tongue: Don't Use Inflammatory Speech

A. Don't exaggerate or overstate things.

1. Try to represent the other person accurately.
2. If that person were sitting next to you, would they agree with how you are presenting their view? Or, if you are speaking to that person, are you being accurate or exaggerating things?
3. For example, music: People will exaggerate, "We never sing hymns anymore;" "How come all we ever sing are hymns? It sounds like a funeral dirge;" "It sounds like a rock concert in here."

B. Speaking truthfully, without exaggeration, is most important when addressing doctrinal differences.

1. Adherents on both sides of the debate over the doctrine of divine election and human free will, for example, often resort to extreme, inflammatory language.
 - a) Some of the Arminian persuasion, who emphasize free will, state that Calvinists base their beliefs on the Greek philosophy of determinism and ignore the Scriptures.
 - b) Some Calvinists, in turn, call Arminians heretics and presume to say they don't think Arminians are born-again believers because of their works-oriented salvation.
2. All such language is misguided and toxic. It is never helpful for discussing profitably the truths of Scripture among those who love God and his Word.

C. Exaggerated speech is a form of falsehood that distorts truth. There can be nothing righteous or holy about it.

XXII. Controlling Criticism: Stop Grumbling and Quarreling

A. Example

1. Think of the World Trade Center in New York City took six long years to build, but it was destroyed in only 90 minutes on September 11, 2001.
2. In a similar way, a local church that has taken a lifetime to build can be devastated in a few months by a sinful firestorm of complaining and quarreling.

B. Grumbling (or complaining) is not constructive or edifying to the family of God.

1. Like a contagious disease, grumbling generates conflict, confusion, and unhappiness that quickly spread throughout a church body until all are infected with discontent.

"Nowhere does the self-centered heart of man more quickly take control than through the machinery of criticism." – J. A. Motyer

2. Grumbling, Motyer goes on to say, is associated with "selfish complaining, unbalanced criticism of small matters, impatience towards what is not understood, grudging unwillingness to be helpful."

C. Even though we are not to “speak evil against one another” or “judge” improperly, there are times when it is necessary and legitimate to admonish, rebuke, judge, or constructively criticize (to point out a fault).

1. Pray

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5)

- a) Before you correct or judge, pray for wisdom, courage, and tact.

“All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except on our prayer lists.” – D. A. Carson

- b) All criticism and rebuke needs to be bathed in prayer. Be assured that God is quite willing to help you know how to speak and act in difficult situations when you look to him.

2. Check your attitudes and motives

- a) Criticism given with an attitude of pride, vindictiveness, or anger will hurt the other person and accomplish little.

- b) Criticism must be given with an attitude of humility that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit and conveys Christian love.

3. Speak gently

- a) All criticism and rebuke needs to be done with gentleness.

- b) Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), and the New Testament emphasizes the importance of dealing with people and their problems with gentleness.

4. Balance criticism with words of encouragement

“Blame comes best on the back of praise.” – Charles Spurgeon

5. Use Scripture to instruct

6. Welcome criticism

7. Do what it takes to build relationships among the elders, outside of just elders’ meetings. Having stronger relationships will help to be a lubricant of sorts when you face conflict within your elder team.

Diotrephes Syndrome

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

Introduction

D. The Background of 3 John

1. The letter was written during the leadership transition between the early apostles and evangelists (like Paul, Timothy, and Titus) to the local church elders in their respective areas. The church fathers were either getting old or dying and the transition had begun.
2. When you think about it, it was a very unique time in church history. Elders are being established, and the apostles are dying off.

E. Diotrephes

"I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9-10 ESV)

XXIII. The Five Traits of Diotrephes

A. Diotrephes sought preeminence.

1. *Philoproteuo* = "loves to be first" "preeminence" "wants to be the leader"
 - a) This is a man who wants to be in charge. He likes to be in control.
 - b) He has a big ego.
 - c) This is a man who was flattered by himself.

"Personal vanity still lies at the root of most dissensions in every local church today."
– John Stott
 - d) Jesus' teaching on leaders wanting to be first: "Whoever wants to be first will be last" (Mark 11).

"It doesn't necessarily follow that Diotrephes had already become the authorized leader in his own church, but simply that he was desirous of the position."
– I. Howard Marshall
 - e) The New Testament model of team leadership began to give way to the autocratic approach.
 - f) Rather than a plurality of leaders, Diotrephes wanted to be first.
2. Leaders who want preeminence are a red flag.
 - a) Some people might have this misconception about eldership. They see eldership as a stepping stone, a notch on their belt.
 - b) They have a misunderstanding that being an elder is about being recognized and noticed and admired. They see it as a position of being served, not serving.

*“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **not domineering over those in your charge**, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:1–4, bold added)*

- c) Diotrephes does the exact opposite of what the apostle Peter said to do.

B. Diotrephes rejected authority.

1. Renderings:
 - a) NIV – “He will have nothing to do with us.”
 - b) NASB – “He does not accept what we say.”
 - c) ESV and Revised – “He does not acknowledge our authority.”
2. This area of control and power issues is perhaps THE major issue facing the church globally today.
3. There are so many dangers of one-man leadership.
 - a) This is one of the reasons Alex wrote *Biblical Eldership*. The New Testament always speaks of a plurality of elders, never one man. Actually this passage on Diotrephes is the only place where a single leader/pastor is mentioned in the Bible, and it isn’t a good one!
 - b) LBC’s leadership structure:
 - 1) We have six other elders. I am one of them. Collectively, we make decisions.
 - 2) If I were to unilaterally make a decision on some important matter, the other six elders would say, “Dave, sit down and keep your mouth shut, please.”
 - 3) The elders won’t tolerate this kind of independent behavior.
4. For Diotrephes, there was no protocol of authority.
 - a) He viewed himself as an independent, unaccountable agent.
 - b) He didn’t submit to the apostle and so he didn’t submit to Christ.
 - c) He thought he is untouchable. He is accountable to no one.

C. Diotrephes gossiped maliciously.

1. He used wicked nonsense with his words (*logos*).
2. He’s a gossip, talking about people.

“Gossip does its evil work by living in the costume of concern and prayer.” –Paul David Tripp
3. Many people don’t think gossip is a big deal. But sins of the tongue are very serious sins.
4. Passages on sins of the tongue:

“O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.” (Ps. 15:1–3)

"There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ... a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers." (Prov. 6:16, 19)

D. Diotrephes refused hospitality to believers.

1. This is part of his independent spirit. Because he won't submit to leadership, he takes matters into his own hands and refuses God's workers, the evangelists and missionaries.
2. *"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9)*
 - a) This was an age when hospitality was extremely important. There weren't hotels like we have today.
 - b) It was crucial that church leaders would show hospitality. An overseer must be "hospitable" (1 Tim. 3:2).
 - c) This is basic. This is elementary Christianity. You welcome Christians.

E. Diotrephes controlled others.

1. He is like a playground bully – "No, we are going to play THIS way!"
 - a) He single-handedly and unilaterally excommunicates people.
 - b) It was *HIS* church and things were going to be *HIS* way.
 - c) It wasn't about Jesus and the glory of his name.
2. The New Testament is clear, we are called to practice church discipline when appropriate, but there are procedures and biblical principles. This guy avoids them all, and takes his own initiative.
 - a) A.T. Robertson, a Greek scholar, wrote an article on Diotrephes for a church magazine. Robertson described Diotrephes as one who wants to control the church according to his own whims. After the article was written twenty different deacons from around the country wrote to the editor to cancel their subscriptions because of the "personal attack" made on them! "What? Controlling the church according to my own whims is wrong?!!"
 - b) I know of a church where the same situation happened. The senior pastor was a real Diotrephes. One Sunday morning he had had enough and he brought a bull whip to church, and he stood behind the pulpit with a rolodex of the members' names and he started kicking people out, one by one.
 - c) Leslie Flynn tells a story, "When the Saints come marching in." He tells the story of a new pastor who was about to start the monthly business meeting when a young woman about 21 years of age approached him and said, "You haven't been to see me yet. After you have consulted with some of the church members you will learn that very few major decisions are made in this church without consulting me first. You didn't consult with me before bringing up this matter of an electric typewriter which you think the church needs. I would suggest you not bother with that tonight." The minister probably thought she was insane and went ahead with the business meeting anyway. When the proposal for the typewriter was presented, she stood up and spoke against it quite eloquently. She then made a motion that they table the proposal. The church voted against her motion. She got up and left the meeting. About ten minutes later she returned with her husband. She interrupted the meeting and said, "Ever since I was fifteen, the pastors here have consulted me. You are the

first minister to insult me in front of my friends. You should have listened to me.” With that the husband pulled out a pistol and aimed it at the minister. He made it out alive, but suffered months of late-night calls and split tires.

- d) Another story: There was a rural pastor who received free gas and vegetables from an older man in the church. The man asked a favor that went against the conscience of the pastor and when the pastor refused to do the favor the man asked him to look for another church because he gave over 30% of the church budget.
3. There are different ways that the Diotrephes Syndrome manifests, but it always destroys.
- a) Pouting or passive-aggressive behavior is another form of the Diotrephes Syndrome. It’s just a different way to control.
 - b) There are cobras and there are pit bulls.

Diotrephes Syndrome

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 2

XXIV. Biblical Antidotes to the Diotrephes Syndrome

A. Don't imitate evil, but imitate good (3 John 11).

1. Imitating good
 - a) There is something so simple about this. Everybody is an imitator.
 - b) Kids can do it.
 - 1) Imitate people you respect and admire in the Christian life.
 - 2) Imitate qualities of different people.
 - 3) Sometimes we can make living the Christian life more complicated than it needs to be. Imitate Jesus.
 - c) Imitate God (Eph. 5:1).
 - 1) Walk like Jesus
 - 2) Let's imitate those who are following God and living for Him.
 - 3) Paul says, "Imitate me."
2. Recognize the Diotrephes in us all.

"The Apostle John recognizes a sworn enemy of the gospel in Diotrephes. What was he up to that was so wrong? The problem was apparently not a 'big' sin like murder or a flagrant moral lapse. It was rather a combination of 'little' problems—some of them seemingly harmless. Diotrephes 'loves to be first.' Don't we all? And then he gossips some. It's pretty hard not to talk about people at all. And then he 'refuses to welcome the brothers' and shows the door to people who disagree with his character judgments. Maybe he was zealous for the purity of the church? . . . It's easy to make excuses for sub-Christian attitudes and behavior. But when what we say or do goes against apostolic council—which for us means Holy Scripture—we are near the edge of a precipice. It doesn't take many 'little' willful missteps to move us a great distance from the mercy and grace of Christ." – Arnold Clinton

B. Diotrephes sought preeminence. The antidote: Promote Jesus and consider others.

1. Promoting Jesus
 - a) Diotrephes sought preeminence in the local church, but there is only room for One Person to have preeminence.
 - b) The worst thing I could do as a preacher is distract you from Jesus. We want to magnify Jesus. We want you to know Jesus. We want to know that Jesus is your Good Shepherd.
 - c) The church and this local church exists to make Christ preeminent. He is the Chief Shepherd. He is the Head of the church, and we are his body.
 - d) Who is the Senior Pastor and Head of this church? Jesus!

2. Considering others

"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves." (Phil. 2:3)

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matt. 5:5)

- a) Leaders are not to be in their own bubble and be "untouchable."
- b) Miriam and Aaron accusing Moses in Numbers 11 – "Does the Lord only speak through Moses?"
- c) Jesus on leadership:

"You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42–45 ESV)

- 1) "What were you discussing?" They were discussing who was the greatest (Mark 9:33–37).
- 2) Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13)
- 3) Love promotes others and considers others (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

C. Diotrephes rejected authority. The antidote: Put ourselves under authority.

- 1. This is SO counter-cultural.
- 2. We have had current elders and other come and ask for counsel.
 - a) "I am under your authority, what would God have me do?"
 - b) I take it as from the Lord.
 - c) Maybe my elders are wrong, but I take it as from the Lord.
- 3. Our tendency is to think, "Well, I know better."
 - a) Don't reject authority; welcome it. See it as a gift from God.
 - b) There was a time when I was facing a major decision in my life. It was before I was even at LBC, but I considered the elders at LBC my shepherds, my pastors. I placed myself under their leadership and trusted their guidance. It was a blessing. I didn't have to over think things. I took their collected wisdom as from God.
 - c) There have been more recent times when I have gone to my fellow elders and sought their council.
 - d) I would gladly do the same thing today.
 - 1) If all of the elders agreed about a matter and were rebuking me on something, I would receive it as from the Lord.
 - 2) Obviously no council of elders is infallible; they are not meant to be. But God has placed people in our lives in positions of authority and we can see it as a blessing or a curse.

- 3) If you are in sin, I can guarantee you will see it as a curse. You will want to remove yourself from the church. You may even attack the elders or the people in the church.
- 4) That's the spirit of Diotrephes. That's what he would do. That's what he did.
4. Submission is like oil in a car; it reduces friction and cools potentially hot situations.
 - a) Submission to the apostles' teaching
 - b) Are you submitting to the Word? If someone comes to you with a verse, will you submit to it?

D. Diotrephes gossiped maliciously. The antidote: Practice encouragement.

"Gossip makes us feel important and needed as we declare our judgments. It makes us feel included to know the inside scoop. It makes us feel powerful to cut someone else down to size, especially someone we are jealous of. It makes us feel righteous, even responsible, to pronounce someone else guilty. Gossip can feel good in multiple ways. But it is of the flesh, not of the Spirit. Gossip is a sin rarely disciplined but often more socially destructive than the sensational sins. Gossip leaves a wide trail of devastation wherever and however it goes – word of mouth, email, blogging, YouTube. It erodes trust and destroys morale. It creates a social environment of suspicion where everyone must wonder what is being said behind their backs and whether appearances of friendship are sincere. It ruins hard-won reputations with cowardly but effective weapons of misrepresentation. It manipulates people into taking sides when no such action is necessary or beneficial. It makes the body of Christ look like the body of Antichrist—destroyers rather than healers." – Ray Ortlund

1. Everyone needs recognition for his or her accomplishments.
 - a) Few people make the need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father: "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say 'Wonderful!'"

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." (Eph. 4:29)
 - b) "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). Therefore, let's always ask ourselves, "These words about to rise up out of my mouth or go out through my keyboard – do they build up? Am I being constructive? If the person I feel like discussing were here with me right now, how would his presence change what I feel like saying?"

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart . . ." (Eph. 5:18–20)
2. Practical suggestions
 - a) Who are some people you could encourage?
 - b) What should we do when a conversation starts slipping into gossip? We should immediately challenge the sin: "Hey friend, sorry to interrupt, but this is gossip. So here's the deal. This conversation is now on hold until you go get _____, and then you can start over and say whatever you feel you must say right to his face. I am willing to be a witness to that conversation, but I will not participate in gossip. What do you choose to do?" Amy Carmichael established this rule at her mission station: "Never about, always to."

- c) What about passing along bad reports?

“From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the principle is this. If you hear bad reports about other Christians you must either cover it with love or go to them personally before speaking of it to any others. The first thing to do is to simply suspend judgment. Don’t pass on bad reports. The second thing to do is “cover” it in love, reminding yourself that you don’t know all about the heart of the person who may have done evil—and you know your own frailty. Don’t allow bad reports to pass into your own heart. The final thing to do is go and speak to them personally.”

– Tim Keller and David Powlison

E. Diotrephes refused hospitality to believers. The antidote: Practice hospitality.

1. Use your home for the glory of God.

- a) Why should we bless and encourage our missionaries? This is why.
- b) We are to be a different kind of community, full of love.
- c) The church is called to bless and take care of the church.

“Self-sacrificing love is thus made the essence of the Christian life.” – B. B. Warfield

2. Practical suggestions

- a) Who are some people you could have over for a meal or for dessert?
- b) When a missionary family or individual comes to town, think of ways to bless them.

F. Diotrephes controlled others. The antidote: Trust God to change people’s hearts.

1. It’s so easy to take matters into our own hands and not wait on God and trust God.

“... love does not insist on its own way.” (1 Cor. 13:5)

2. Practical suggestions

- a) We are not called to take control and force people to do something . . . or pout or whine . . . we are called to trust God to move . . .

“We need to learn to move man through God.” – Hudson Taylor

- b) Take the situation to God in prayer.

1) “Do your friends despise forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.”

2) Is there anything you need to let go of?