

WHO HAS THE PREMINENCE?

There has always been a desire on the part of some to be preeminent among the followers of Christ. In Matthew 20 we learn that the mother of James and John came to Jesus with her sons and requested the places of preeminence in the kingdom for her sons (vv. 20–28). Mark 10:35–45 tells us that James and John came to Jesus themselves with the same request. On both occasions Jesus' response is the same. There is no place in the kingdom for the domination of or for exercising lordship over other disciples. Jesus made it clear that in the kingdom, He has "all authority" (Mat. 28:18). Paul wrote of the authority the Father gave to His Son: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22–23).

Many years after learning this vital lesson himself, John encountered Diotrephes "who loveth to have the preeminence" (3 John 9). This expression in the Greek is a compound verb, combining a verb which means "to love" and a verb which means "to have first place." The second of these verbs occurs only once in the New Testament in Colossians 1:18 where it is used of Christ, "that in all things he might have the preeminence." Diotrephes was running the church to ruin because of his exaggerated appraisal of his own worth and his lack of concern for the Truth and for the welfare of the church.

Regrettably, there are still some of the sort of Diotrephes in the church who seize power for themselves, thinking that the church stands or falls with them. They believe that their judgments, ideas, and plans are more important than the church itself. Their love for preeminence usually exhibits itself like that of Diotrephes in 3 John 9–11 by: (1) accusing faithful preachers falsely, (2) forbidding others in the church to receive faithful Gospel teachers, and (3) expelling from the church those who refuse to bow to their will. Such domination in the church is always wrong. We must never place ourselves in such a position or allow others to do so (Rom. 16:17). The church is greater than any personality.

The church does not depend upon any living person(s) for its existence and well-being. The church is built upon Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) and is founded and sustained by truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church does not belong to us; it belongs to Christ (Mat. 16:18). Our obligation is to respect and submit to His authority (28:18) by abiding in His Word (John 8:31). We must speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent (1 Pet. 4:11). We show our love for Christ and for His church, the body of Christ, by doing His will (John 14:15). Those who refuse to abide in the teachings of Christ do not have God (2 John 9).

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