

Countering Presumptuousness

Contentment

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This past week my family and I sat down and we watched the rerun—I guess it was—of the 10th Anniversary Special of "Les Miserables" on PBS television. I don't know if you've seen "Les Miserables" or heard the music, or even know the story. In this musical adaptation of the story, near the end the main character, Jean Valjean, sings a song called "Let Him Live." It's pretty much the high point of the entire movie. It's a very moving song because the song is basically a prayer that he's praying to God, beseeching God to let Marius live. Marius is a young boy who is a student in college and who is in love with Valjean's daughter. Valjean is asking God to let Marius live.

There is a rebellion against the government going on, and Marius has joined the rebellion and he's been injured. Jean Valjean asked God in this song to let him live. He says words to this effect: "I am old. I've lived a long life. I've had a good life. I've done all that I needed to do. Take me instead. If one of us has to die, take me, and let him live." It's a very moving song to hear.

Seeing this again and hearing the words, kind of pondering what he asked for, made me think about his attitude. He's a very noble character in this story. He had been sentenced to jail for twenty years for stealing a loaf of bread. He finally gets out, and the rest of his life he spends being pursued by a lawman, Javert, who can only think of justice. Javert thinks that justice wasn't served against Jean Valjean, and so he pursues him all his life. That's why it's called "Les Miserables."

The whole story about Jean Valjean is a tale of misery. It's almost a pitiful existence. But he was able to look from the end of his life backwards and say, "I've lived a full life. I've done all that I needed to do. I don't have any regrets." This man, Jean Valjean, was *always* sacrificing himself, sometimes to his own hurt—many times to his own hurt—to help others. He took a young girl into his home because her mother had died, and he raised her as his own. He loved her for all of his worth, for all that he could, and that's why he wanted Marius to live, so that the young girl could be happy with Marius.

This reminded me of what the Apostle Paul said about his own life in II Timothy 4:6-7. Paul is in jail. He's writing a letter to his young friend Timothy. Looking back on his own life, he says:

II Timothy 4:6-7 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

Paul was ready to pass the mantle on to young men like Timothy and Titus, to take care of the churches in the Gentile world. Like Jean Valjean, Paul looked back on his life and saw what he had accomplished. He had done a great work for God throughout his life. He had gone from persecuting the church to being its greatest champion in getting the gospel preached throughout the Gentile world.

He saw that he had done the best that he could. And look what he did! Fourteen books of the Bible. He founded who knows how many churches, the conversion of who knows how many people, and he looked back and he said, "I've lived a full life. I've finished the task that God has set for me. I have no regrets for the life I've lived since conversion."

I'm sure he regretted the things that he did before conversion, but that was past. That had been forgiven, and he had gone on to the great things that God had had in store for him. He would not rage against God, or say that God had treated him unfairly. We could go back to the other Scriptures where he said he had been beaten so many times, and he'd been flogged so many times.

He had been stoned and left for dead, and drowning in the sea, and in hunger, and all those other things—those "great perils of Paul" that he had gone through. But they were nothing. He didn't have any regrets. His life had been lived to the fullest for God. He didn't rage, saying that he deserved better, that he should go to his rest in peace. He didn't ask for any of those things. He was content.

I've kind of whittled the antidote to presumptuousness down to the attitude of contentment. If you are content, you are not presumptuous. A contented person is satisfied. That's basically what the word means. A contented person is satisfied with his position, with what life has dealt him, or we could say "one's lot in life". He's happy where God has put him, and he doesn't ask for more, but he's willing to fulfill that task, fulfill that lot to the best of his abilities and not ask anything more.

He's not always striving to get ahead, to be out front, to be ahead of the crowd, to have so many things. That's not how his life is lived. That's not what he's really trying to get. He's not trying to have notoriety or fame. He's not out to seek the respect of everyone. He doesn't want necessarily to be recognized for all his accomplishments. He doesn't even need to be accepted all the time. A person who is truly content is never presumptuous.

Before we go into "contentment" more fully, I want to go back and review some of the last sermon on presumptuousness. I'm only going to go to one Scripture that I actually went to last time. We'll go to other Scriptures and rehearse what we learned last month.

Just to define it a little bit, we saw that "presumptuousness" is the arrogant attitude of one who confidently assumes a thing to be true, and then acts upon it. What it comes down to is, taking upon one's self the authority to do something that has not been given at all, or has been given to another. As I said last time, in colloquial terms we could say "it's getting to big for your britches." Another way of putting it is "acting or reaching above one's station." It is going beyond one's office or position—taking upon one's self things that are not his. We saw that it was a very serious sin.

Numbers 15 spells it out most clearly. This is where intentional and unintentional sin are contrasted.

Numbers 15:27-31 And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, both for him who is native born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandments, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.

I think this helps us define what *presumptuousness* is. It is doing something arrogantly, rebelliously, defiantly, and intentionally. It is being headstrong and haughty to do something despite what God might say on the matter. It is taking matters into one's own hands. Remember that we saw last time

that for this intentional sin there is no sacrifice. It says the guilt remains. The person is cut off, which usually in biblical language means they are killed. The person is executed, and the guilt remains. A very serious sin.

It's just like God to put an example of what He had just been talking about right in the next chapter. Numbers 16 is the rebellion of Korah and his gang. We'll read some of this. Reubenites and Levites are mixed up in this.

Numbers 16:1-2 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.

This would be like taking all the leading men of a worldwide church, and then marching up to the person who is in charge of this worldwide church, and demanding that he kowtow to their terms.

Numbers 16:3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them.

"Look! Who are you? You've taken to yourself this authority, but this authority should be shared among all the people, because we're all called out. We're all holy before God. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?"

Now listen to what they said. It's very interesting. Here they say, "You are taking too much authority to yourself. Everybody should have this authority." And then they accuse Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves. "You put yourself in this position." Just remember these things that they said, because it's going to come back to haunt them in a minute.

Numbers 16:4 So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face.

I think he was dodging the lightning bolt that he thought would come. That's the import of these words that they said against him and Aaron.

Numbers 16:5 And he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him: that one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him."

Moses replied in a very interesting way. These two hundred fifty men tromp up to Moses, knock on his door and say, "You take too much authority on yourself. It should be shared among us two hundred and fifty." And Moses said, "You'd better watch out, because tomorrow morning God is going to show which ONE is holy, which ONE He has chosen to lead this people." So he tells them to do this:

Numbers 16:6-7 "Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses shall be the holy one [the one set apart for this task]. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

This is an inter-family squabble; not just inter-church or international. This was mostly a squabble among Levites. It was headed by a grandson of Kohath. Very interesting. Moses puts the blame squarely on the ones who were in charge. This was spearheaded by the Levites who thought they had been kept out of the good positions. What they had to do was just take down the Tabernacle and cart it off and do all these physical labors, while *Aaron's* family got to be priests.

Numbers 16:8-10 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

No. You see, Korah and Dathan and Abiram (and all the other two hundred and fifty men) were not content with what God had given them to do in the church of the wilderness. They didn't want to be porters and bearers. They didn't want to be the setup crew, or the take-down crew. They wanted to be the mediators between God and men. They wanted the cushy job—the one they saw that had the most going for it, the one they saw had the most authority. They were not content with where God had placed them in the body at the time. In verse 31 we'll see what happens.

Moses tells everybody to "Clear out! Get away from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. If you don't want to be caught in what they've just done, stay away!"

Numbers 16:31-32 Then it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods.

Men, women, children, tents, livestock—any kind of possession that they had, the earth opened up and they fell in.

Numbers 16:33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the congregation.

Did God show who was holy, or what? They went down to the pit. There was no sacrifice for that sin.

We saw throughout the last sermon that God is very quick to punish presumptuous sin, and it seems like He's always casting these people down. It's very interesting, because they've exalted themselves, and he puts them down again. Let's go to Isaiah 14 and see the original presumptuous sin. God does the same thing here.

Isaiah 14:12 How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!

Doesn't that sound a lot like what just happened with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? Weren't they cut down to the ground? Actually they were cut down below the ground, and the earth swallowed them up.

Isaiah 14:13 For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north.

Remember that "north." We'll come back to it in a little bit. The north is where God's throne is—way in the north of heaven. What Satan was trying to do here, or before he became Satan (he was already in the attitude of Satan), but this Lucifer or Helel decided he was going to exalt himself and his throne and attack God and supplant Him.

Isaiah 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.

That's interesting, because his domain only went as far as the clouds. His place of authority was within the atmosphere of this earth, and he says, "I'm going to take my throne and put it way out there beyond what I've been given, because this is not enough for me. I have to go break the gravity of this earth and go among the stars, and I'm going to be the top dog in this universe." He says, "I will be the Most High." Then there is a comment here.

Isaiah 14:15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol [the pit].

Satan shall be brought to the lowest depths of the pit. The bottomless pit is one day the place he will inhabit. Ezekiel 28 opens up a little more on this attitude. This is written in a little bit different way, but it's talking about the same scenario.

Ezekiel 28:12-15 Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre [which is a code name for Satan] and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Let's think of what he was here. He was the pinnacle of what God can create. At least that's the way it seems—the "seal of perfection," the most perfect being, full of wisdom and beauty. He was made with precious stones right in his being. Music—beautiful music I'm sure—was part of him. He had a great position as the "covering cherub." He walked where God was, amidst the fiery stones. He had it all. Well, he should have had it all. That should have been all for him, but he began to think, "I'm still one step down from the top. I really don't have it all. I want to be on the next level of management. I want to be the CEO of the universe. I think I'll overthrow God."

Ezekiel 28:16 By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within,

I still haven't figured out what all that means—"the abundance of trading filled with violence," but it shows a measure of competition. That's at least the basic understanding of that. He began to be in competition with God. He was not content with his position, so he went into competition with God, and it filled him with violence and sin.

This attitude of competition, once it's taken too far, becomes violent. The only way you can win is by beating down the other guy. Because these attitudes had welled up in him, God said:

Ezekiel 28:16-17 Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty [filled with pride]; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.

God had made him perfect in wisdom, had He not? But Lucifer, or Helel (however you want to call him) corrupted that wisdom. Wisdom is normally, in biblical terms, the actual doing of righteousness. What happened was his doings became corrupted. His actions became corrupted. He should have known better because God had given him that knowledge, that wisdom. Early on he had acted in wisdom, but this competition, this discontent, this pride, caused him to corrupt his way of life.

Ezekiel 28:17-18 I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you. You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you.

His own splendor blinded him to what was real and true. What was real and true is that God is always going to be on top. He's always going to be the authority, and no thing that has been created can supplant the Creator. It was total hubris—overwhelming pride—that caused him to do this, because he was discontent with his position, and he presumptuously thought he could overthrow God, and tried to, and he got slammed right back down to earth.

Let's go to Jude 6. It was not just him, but all of those who went along with his scheme. This is very interesting. It gets back into this idea of contentment, or discontentment; contentment meaning being happy or satisfied with your proper place. Listen to what Jude says about the angels that sinned.

Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain...

That's very interesting the way Jude puts that. They weren't "the bad angels." They weren't even "the angels who sinned." He said "the angels who were not content with where God had placed them."

Jude 6 The angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

We know from Revelation that one-third of the angels was under Lucifer's, or Helel's, hand, and he convinced them to leave their proper domain—the place where they had dominion, the place of their responsibility, the place of their authority—so that they could get more for themselves, and they sinned. Their discontentment caused them to attempt to take by force what had not been given, but which they thought they deserved. Once again this is the same thing that happened in Korah's rebellion.

Let's go to Hebrews 1:14 and we'll see what their proper domain was. This is kind of a blanket statement of God's reason for creating the angels. I call it "a definition scripture."

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

You see, angels were created to be servants—ministering spirits. Whom were they to serve? Well obviously they were supposed to serve God, but ultimately they were created to serve us—those whom God has called to salvation.

There was one-third of the angels who were not satisfied with that job. They had been sent to this earth to be under Helel, the covering cherub. What were they supposed to do there on earth? Do you think they were just going to eat, drink, and be merry, and have this earth for their own? Well, it was going to be their home, but what were they preparing for? Man! They were going to serve mankind, because this is where God was going to get His plan started and finish it.

So He sent them to this earth to prepare for the time that God would create man on the earth, and then these angels would continue in their service of man so that mankind could eventually inherit God's kingdom which *too* was going to come to this earth. But that wasn't enough for them. They wanted to rule it and have it for themselves; and not only the earth, but heaven as well, and God's throne, and everything.

Here they were, created beings with not even the power that's in God's little finger. What pride! What presumptuousness! How could they ever come to the conclusion that they could defeat God?

I scratch my head in wonderment that they had only one-third of the angels, and they thought that they could overthrow God. What about the other two-thirds? God could just say, "Okay, two-thirds. Go out. Get this other one-third. You're strong enough." But they had the pride to think that they could, against the odds, overthrow God and the other two-thirds of the angels. That's just amazing to me. And that's what presumptuousness does.

It makes you think all wacky. You think too much of yourself. "I should **have** that." "I could do better than him." "Why in the world did he pick him for this job? He can hardly spell his name, and I'm so great I can spell my name and other people's names too. I should have that job."

I think we're seeing the pattern that this sin takes. We have just seen three examples: Korah, Satan, and the angels that sinned. This presumptuousness begins by overestimating our own importance, and then we couple that with a feeling of being treated unfairly. First of all we think that we are something, and then we think, "Well, we haven't gotten all the breaks. He hasn't treated me like he's treated so-and so." Remember, Paul said that "those who compare themselves among themselves are not wise."

And then this grows. Most of the time it simmers and gets hotter and hotter and starts to boil over into discontentment with what we've been given, and then it bursts out into open rebellion. Do you know who the ultimate target of that rebellion is? It's God, because God is the one who has placed you and that other person in the positions that He has. He's sovereign. He orders us as He wishes. When we're presumptuous, we try to change what He has set up. And men, because of human nature, tend to do this as a matter of course.

We kind of joke about "climbing the ladder" and gouging and pulling down people on our way up. That's just the way of the world. That's how it works, and it takes one with the holy spirit to overcome this very human tendency. It's a very Satanic tendency, because he was the one who came up with it first, and he broadcast that to us, and our human nature picks it up and tries to mimic it: "I deserve more." "I haven't been treated fairly." "I wish I had something else, something more along my line." And then we become rebellious.

Of course our best example is Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5-9 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

This is very interesting to contrast what He did here with what Satan did, what Korah did, what the other angels that sinned did. And we could add other people like Achan and his sin before Jericho, when he took the things that were dedicated to God—the same type of sin. Let's compare a little bit.

Jesus Christ already had the highest position. As a matter of fact it says here He was equal with God. It doesn't say that the Father was more, because at this time they were "God and the Word." This is before His incarnation, before He became man, and these Two were equal. That's what it says there. It's very clear. But the One who became Jesus (the Word) said, "Being equal with God is not something I'm going to hold onto for all I'm worth." Now that's saying something.

He did not judge that being God's equal was something that He should grasp, seize, and not let anything happen to change it. This is the mind of Christ that we're talking about. He was not presumptuous to think that He was the most important person in the universe, even though we would say that He is equal with the Father. But He did not consider Himself in that light. What He considered was that if He demoted Himself, that the greater good would happen—would be produced.

Satan said, "I am not the greatest, so I want to become the greatest." He tried to go up the ladder. What did Jesus Christ do? He said, "I am the greatest, but so that everything will work out in this plan, I will go down the ladder to the very bottom rung to become a man." He was not so full of Himself that He felt that He ought to hold onto that top position with all His might as Almighty God, but instead He would let Himself be made into a little sperm cell that would impregnate the egg within Mary to produce Jesus.

Did you know that the sperm cell is the smallest cell in the human body? Think about it. He went from the greatness of God to something you can't even see. It's just awesome to think about. Where Satan wanted to make himself big and great, Jesus' mind was so perfect that He was willing to go from greatness to nothing for the good of mankind. That's actually what this "of no reputation" means—*that made Himself as nothing*. He was content to be nothing if it would work God's plan out and bring it to fruition. That's mind-boggling to really consider.

We are so tuned in to this world to being the best that we can be. That's not a bad thing if you do it within the limits of God's law. But when we think along with that, "I've got to be on top," "I've got to be the top dog," "I've got to be king of the mountain," "I've got to have the biggest paycheck," "I've got to be on top of this company," "I've got to do this," "I've got to do that," "I've got to have notoriety and fame," and Jesus said that His mind is one that is willing to become nothing for the greater good of God's plan. He was content to be a sperm cell. That's hard to get my mind around.

Paul came to this conclusion in I Corinthians 7, and he preached it to the church.

I Corinthians 7:17-24 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain [or direct] in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. [Sure, if you can get your freedom, go ahead and use it for the good of the church.] For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. [It amounts to pretty much the same thing.] You were bought at a price [Look what God did for you]; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called.

This is a general overall principle. Be content with where God has placed you. Be content with the circumstances of your life that God seems to be satisfied with for the time. The thing that really matters is not what position we have, not how highly regarded we are, not how good or how bad a speaker we are, or whatever it happens to be—keeping the commandments is what matters. If we're in a position, and we keep God's commandments, then it's very likely that God Himself will change our circumstances. He will promote us one way or another.

Hebrews 13:5 gives Paul's closing admonitions at the end of this book. He says such things as, "Let brotherly love continue," and "Don't forget to entertain strangers," and "Remember the prisoners," and "Keep your marriage vows holy."

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have.

He's talking here about being covetous, meaning that we want more for ourselves—things that other people seem to have and we don't. So he says, "Be content with what you have. Don't get all excited and riled up about it."

Hebrews 13:5 For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

It's very interesting that that sentence comes after "Be content." He says, "Be content," and then he says, "God has told you He'll never leave you nor forsake you." We are discontent, but when we're dissatisfied, one of the first thoughts that we normally have is that God has abandoned us, that He doesn't care about us, that He hasn't blessed us. Paul said, "Don't think that way. Be content with where you are because God has not left you. He'll never leave you nor forsake you. You are exactly where He wants you, so you have no reason to be discontent. God has placed you in the Body where it pleases Him." And that should be enough for us.

Let's read I Timothy 6. I came to this one because we've just been talking about covetousness in Hebrews 13, and this came to mind as well. This is very interesting the way this argument develops. So just think about that.

I Timothy 6:3-8 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to

godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

I thought the way this argument progressed was very intriguing. He started out talking about those who were apostatizing, those who were preaching a false gospel, those who were rejecting what Christ had given the church in the gospel, and he ends up with contentment.

What I got from this is that those who argue against the doctrines of God and against the church are discontent. They are at the beginning stages of presumptuousness. They may have already gone into presumptuousness. They're trying to use their "godliness" to get some sort of advantage or gain for themselves. The motives on the surface may seem that they're trying to be godly, but Paul says here that under all of that the real motive is to get something.

Let's not just leave this "great gain" as money or goods. It could be respect. It could be favor with somebody. It could be notoriety or having people think that you're smart, or being ordained, or having your own group to follow a person. It could be many things. It could be "finally having authority." What it comes down to is presumptuousness, because the person who does these things is going beyond his place.

God put the person in the body at a specific point, to do a certain a job, and when he starts doing these types of things—arguing against the doctrine—he's taking a job that he hasn't been given. Paul says the real gain is that we behave in a godly manner and reckon that what we have is sufficient for us.

There is an example of this in III John. We don't go to III John very often, but in this little 14-verse book there is an example of someone who was just like this description Paul gave in I Timothy.

III John 9-11 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, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

Now who is this Diotrephes? Maybe I should say, "Who does this Diotrephes think he is?" Was he an apostle? Was he an evangelist? Was he a pastor? Was he a leading man in the congregation? Was he an ordinary member? John doesn't say, but it's very interesting that it says here that he just loves to have the preeminence among them. It almost sounds like he's just a normal average member of the church. Maybe he was an elder. I don't know.

One of his most marked characteristics is he liked to be "Number One." He had to be the important guy, the one everybody came to for answers to their questions, to decide for people about things. He went so far to even maliciously say things against John—one of the original twelve apostles. He prated against him with malicious words. He spoke down on him.

This is far worse than saying bad things about Herbert Armstrong. This was the disciple that *Jesus loved*, and here some little man, in the church at Ephesus probably, was talking against John the Apostle who had put his life on the line for the church many times, who had spent years in exile on the Isle of Patmos, who (tradition says) was put in a vat of boiling oil, and was not harmed a bit; a man whom God was obviously with, and this Diotrephes thought he was so important and so big that he could point out John's flaws to the rest of the congregation.

And then he started putting people out of the church because they didn't agree with him, and he put people out of the church who wanted to fellowship with their brethren whom he had put out, and John said, "*When I get there I'm going to take care of this. I'm going to call to mind all these things and make it so apparent what this guy is.*"

He was "a Satan in the flesh" almost given the way he treated the congregation. It was evil. That's what it says in verse 11. "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil." He's saying, "Don't imitate the actions of this man Diotrephes. He is doing exactly what Satan did."

Let's go to I Timothy 3 for just a moment. Maybe this was one of these occasions when "hands were laid on" someone too soon.

I Timothy 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

It's not wrong to want to be an elder, or an overseer, or a pastor. That's not a bad thing if your motives are right in wanting to do this. It's a good work to be a pastor of a church and to help the people, and to do it in a godly way.

I Timothy 3:2-7 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, soberminded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice [This may have been what happened with Diotrephes. I don't know.], lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

A spiritually immature person in an office of authority like this will follow the same course that Satan took. He'll get a big head and he'll try to grasp beyond his position.

Philippians 4:11-13 I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Now here is the proper attitude. He was content whether poor or prosperous. He was content whether he was weak or strong. He was content whether people loved him or people hated him. It's not easy to do sometimes, but he said, "Whatever state I'm in, I'm going to be content because when I have Christ in me, I can do anything that He wants me to do, so I can't think about those other things. I have to be content with what God has given."

A person's condition or his position doesn't matter a whit as long as Christ is working through him.

II Corinthians 12 is that section where Paul had a thorn in his flesh and he asked God three times to take it away.

II Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

He says that twice. God did this so he wouldn't get too big for his britches, because He had given him some revelations, and that could tend to swell a person's head. And so Paul said God allowed Satan to afflict him so that he wouldn't go beyond what he had been given.

II Corinthians 12:8-9 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Did you know that that word "sufficient" is the adjective form that is used back there in Philippians 4:11 of the word "contentment"? What he had was sufficient, and he was content.

II Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

God's grace is sufficient for us. "Grace" in just a general overall term is "favor." Grace is what God favors us with. It's what He gives to us. It can include gifts, or even physical things that He provides. It's by His grace that we have food to eat every day, that we have clothes to wear, that we have a roof over our head, or a car to drive.

What Paul says here is that he considered his "thorn in the flesh" to be part of God's grace. That's a hard thing to think about, that an affliction that God allows could be part of His grace toward us. Why did he say that? Because God balanced out for Paul the revelations that he had received with an infirmity, whatever it happened to be, so that he wouldn't get big-headed, and sin presumptuously and lose his salvation.

It was good for Paul to be afflicted, because if he were not afflicted, he just might have done something that he would have regretted, like something presumptuous of taking upon himself too much (more than had given). So Paul said, "I'm content being afflicted, because I know that this is sufficient for me. This is good for me to make it into God's kingdom."

We have a hard time thinking that way. We think that this sort of affliction would be evil, but Paul turns that on its head and says, "No, it was good, because when I have that affliction, I am weak, and because I am weak, then I don't get a big head, and Christ can work in and through me, and the work gets done." And so he was content.

Psalms 75:1-5 We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near. "When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah. I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck.' "

The margin says for "stiff neck," *with insolent pride*. You could just as easily say, "Do not speak presumptuously." Now listen to what he says.

Psalm 75:6 For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

Where does it come from? From the north. Remember, we said we'd get back to that. North is where the Judge lives, and He's judging our character. He's judging our actions. He's judging to see whether we deserve to be promoted.

Psalm 75:7-10 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another. [It's all in His hands.] For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down. But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. "All the horns [the strength, the might] of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."

They won't exalt themselves. *He* will promote them. *He* will exalt them when it is the proper time. In the meantime it is best for all of us that we be content with where He has put us. We don't need to go as far as Korah or Diotrefes to be presumptuous. We can be presumptuous anytime we take something upon ourselves that has not been given to us to do, thinking that we know better. That's just plain pride.

The cure for presumptuous behavior is realizing what God has given us, where He has placed us, and what is best for us at the time. If we work within the parameters He has set for us, we will grow, and we'll perform the task He's asked us to do.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

We need to remember we're all in this together. We're working as one body.

I Corinthians 12:13 For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Remember I talked about staying in the calling wherein you were called. We should have a common mind, a common goal. We should be thinking that our actions affect the whole body.

I Corinthians 12:14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

This is so important to remember. We are Christ's body, and God has placed us just where He wants us *in* the body, ...not that He has just placed us in the body, He has placed us in a particular place in the body, and He wants us to be there and do the job He's assigned us and not try to be something that He did not give us the position or the authority to do. So let's be content with the wisdom of His placement of us in the church and let *Him* exalt us in due time.