


3 JOHN 9-12

DEALING WITH THE PREACHER-EATERS

“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.

“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.”^{1,2}

ne of the most insidious snares to threaten a pastor is the church member who believes himself (or herself) to be superior to the pastor. This individual is assured that he (or she) is responsible to direct the work of the pastor; this person often believes the pastor is incapable of performing the duties which God assigned, or perhaps he believes that the pastor is callused and uncaring about “his” congregation. Often, this individual will go so far as to assert his (or her) right to dictate what is preached and even how the message is to be delivered. It is significant that the individual is almost always male, though he is frequently urged on in his quest to dominate the pulpit by a wife or woman who considers herself to possess superior intellect and spiritual insight to all others who may be in the church.

The goal of the effort is to make the preacher’s message palatable for any outsiders who attend. Perhaps this condition is the result of importing the concept of democracy into the life of the church, or perhaps it is laziness on the part of the professed people of God, or perhaps it results from a lack of sound instruction provided by those who are appointed as elders.

One thing is abundantly evident—contemporary churches are often seen by church members as an organisation, much like any civic organisation or fraternal order, subject to the same rules specified by governmental bureaucracies that dictate conduct in all registered clubs and organisations. Thus, elections and a superficial democracy become extremely important in the conduct of modern church life. However, this was not always the case. The earliest churches were certainly not organised in this manner—they were theocracies, directed by those whom God appointed to exercise oversight. Whenever one assumes the position of God-appointed oversight, that individual asserts that they are conscious of the divine operation in their lives.

One detrimental aspect of contemporary church life seems to be the presence of a powerful individual or clique, often working behind the scenes to control the church. This condition is an entrenched feature of most contemporary churches. For well over forty years I’ve searched in vain for the verse that directs a group to “control” the church. The famous verse that designates one individual to control the church has yet to be found. The elders are to be overseers. Those appointed by God as elders are designated as overseers with authority conferred by God Himself to protect the flock, to correct the unruly, to rebuke the froward and to instruct all in righteousness.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² I shamelessly adopted the title from an article by Joe McKeever, “Dealing With the Preacher Eaters,” <http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/joe-mckeever-dealing-with-the-preacher-eaters-965.asp>

It is appropriate to call these Sons of Diotrephes “Preacher Eaters”; they chew up preachers and spit them out. From the days of the Apostles until this present hour, the Preacher Eater has destroyed many of God’s choice servants, desecrated churches and decimated congregations. In every era, in every imaginable culture and within every conceivable communion, the Preacher Eater has worked to destroy the work of the Lord. Almost every servant of God can speak of a church in which he spent twenty miserable years during one three year stint. Almost inevitably the misery resulted because one individual usurped authority over the heritage of the Lord. Whenever an individual or a clique usurps responsibility to direct the pastoral ministry to their satisfaction, they act contrary to the Word of God; such people must assume responsibility before God for what they do. Because God does not immediately rebuke them is no reason to assume that He approves of their destructive work.

THE SPIRITUAL ANATOMY OF A “PREACHER EATER” — “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.

“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.”

I suspect I’ve witnessed more than my share of such challenges as the ministry God has given me has compelled me frequently to confront such situations. During my days serving in Canada, I have either started or restarted nine churches. Of the seven churches that were restarted, all were in a state of dreadful disrepair when I arrived. I wish I could say that I won every battle I was compelled to wage; however, I’ve learned that in this life sometimes the dragon wins. I have a few successes; and in several instances I pronounced the eulogy for the congregation, warning the people of the consequences of their choices to disregard the Word.

In almost every one of the churches that slipped beneath the waves of history, a church boss had maintained a stranglehold on the congregation for so long that people thought gasping for breath was normal. He—or she in one glaring instance—was determined to maintain control at all costs; the Preacher Eater was determined to ensure that the pastor worked for them. The congregation made a choice—if only by default—to permit the Preacher Eater to serve as de facto overseer, imagining there were no consequences for their choice; and the churches withered and at last died after a lingering illness.

Some might object that it is wrong to characterise all church bosses by the conduct of one individual. However, God has provided a description of Diotrephes, and the characterisation He has provided seems universally applicable to the Preacher Eater. Explicitly or implicitly, John makes six statements describing the Preacher Eater.

The Preacher Eater has an exalted opinion of himself or herself. “Diotrephes ... likes to put himself first.” Let me read this ninth verse from some other current translations. “Diotrephes ... loves to be in charge...”³ Here’s another recent translation of what John wrote. “Diotrephes ... loves to be their leader...”⁴ He likes to “put himself first”; he “loves to be in charge”; he “loves to be their leader.” In short, the Preacher Eater has a high opinion of himself, or of herself. Diotrephes has a love affair with himself, and he loves the sense of power over God’s people.

³ **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

⁴ **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

The Preacher Eater imagines that God is dependent upon his expertise if the church is to prosper. In most instances, this individual will have come into the fellowship of a congregation that at one time thrived and prospered. A preacher once held forth in power, declaring the glories of the Living God. The Preacher Eater came into the congregation and gradually assumed a position of authority. Perhaps the Preacher Eater began as a serious disciple of the Master, rising to leadership on his merit. Perhaps the Preacher Eater stepped in during a time of crisis for the congregation, and his leadership saved the church from disaster. The congregation in this instance would quite naturally be grateful; and the gratitude of the congregation would induce them to continue to look to this individual for leadership long after the crisis is past.

Others who grow into Preacher Eaters are ungodly individuals who assume their roles by virtue of wealth, political influence or community stature. The individual is used to deference during the week, and he expects—and is accorded—the same deference within the assembly of the righteous. If he is regular in attendance and generous, he will be “elected” to a position of power. In either of these instances that the Preacher Eater assumes power by default because the sheep are unwilling to oppose what is happening. Tragically, most Christians don’t want to be bothered by questions of policy or the minutiae of caring for the church.

With few restraints on his influence, the Preacher Eater begins to think of himself as a saviour of the church. What is worse, the congregation permits him to continue in his role as saviour, continually looking to see what he will do before making any decision. In time, the Preacher Eater thinks of himself as the legitimate decision maker for the congregation. As McKeever notes, “Whether he is godly and humble—Spirit-filled and mission-minded, with a servant spirit and a heart for God—or not, rarely comes into play in the typical church.”⁵

The Preacher Eater rejects God-appointed authority. “Diotrephes ... does not acknowledge our authority.” Imagine! The Preacher Eater rejected John’s authority! Appointment as one of the Twelve Apostles failed to impress Diotrephes; he considered himself God’s appointed emissary for the church over which he assumed power.

I recall a Preacher Eater taking me aside on one occasion to inform me, “There are five people in this church, if we want something, we get it. If we don’t want it, it ain’t gonna’ happen.” It was a warning; the gauntlet had been thrown down and the challenge issued. What arrogance! That particular congregation no longer exists; it has long since faded into a distant sad memory for the few people who attended there in the final days.

Let me say with confidence born of study of the Word that God appoints whom He chooses to pastoral leadership. A church does not elect elders, nor does God condone anyone promoting himself or herself to such a position. God appoints and the congregation receives him whom God appoints. Moreover, the elders of the congregation direct the decision making process. The church is not a democracy—it is the Body of Christ, seeking His will in all things and endeavouring to please Him in every activity and in every decision.

The Preacher Eater resorts to speaking nonsense against God’s authority. “[Diotrephes is] talking wicked nonsense against us.” What is said is nonsense; but because it is nonsense, it is wicked. The word John uses speaks of statements that make no sense, primarily because of ignorance, though it is possible that no one actually understands what is being said. Really, the Preacher Eater speaks ignorantly because he (or she) has chosen to ignore God’s Word and will. Should the Preacher Eater actually think, considering what God has said in His Word, he would not act so ignorantly. However, having rejected God-appointed authority and enamoured of his own person, he is unprepared to hear what God has to say on any issue.

⁵ Joe McKeever, op. cit.

I well remember a man who referred to himself as “Chairman of the Church.” He did this without opposition from the other six members of the board. As an aside of considerable importance, the only board found in the New Testament results from a shipwreck. Where is that famous verse that instructs a church to set up a board to “run the church?”

During one particularly contentious meeting shortly after I had arrived, this self-important dictator was arguing some fine point of church polity. I referred to the constitution of the church, a copy of which I had received when I arrived, only to have my reference summarily rejected. “That’s not the constitution we use,” he sneered.

“Well, it’s the one I was given when I arrived,” I offered.

“The only constitution we have is the one I use,” he asserted.

When I pointed out that the point he was arguing was clearly in conflict with biblical doctrine, he haughtily replied, “We’re Canadian. We obey the law.”

I was somewhat concerned that such arrogance surely was the result of ignorance; thus, I gently asked, “If you witness a conflict between the constitution of the congregation and the Word of God, which do you follow?”

“We follow the constitution,” he shouted triumphantly, as though despite being dense and obtuse I at last understood the obvious. In fact, I was amazed by his arrogance and his ignorance. Whilst his arrogance and ignorance was astonishing, the lack of response by the other men on that board truly astounded me. They neither objected nor cautioned against arrogance. Frankly, the man was speaking nonsense; and his nonsense had long since lapsed into wickedness. Now, his wickedness infected others resulting in the eventual death of the church.

The Preacher Eater isolates himself or herself. “Diotrephes ... refuses to welcome the brothers.” The prevailing concept within Christendom is a universal church, whether visible as in the thought of Catholic theologians, or invisible, as prevails in the thought of Protestant and Evangelical theologians. Despite the prevalence of the concept among theologians, the practise of comity is rare. Theologians and preachers within each denomination assume they are correct, and thus view those representative of other communions with a measure of suspicion. I suppose this could be considered a serious problem, though it usually represents a preference rather than a true conviction.

Far more serious is the tendency of the Preacher Eater to view his own congregation as his personal fiefdom, excluding any interaction with others who may differ in minor issues. I’m not speaking of the need to exclude those who espouse what is clearly errant doctrine; rather, I’m speaking of those who differ in secondary issues such as church polity, literature preference or musical styles. The effort to be pure is commendable, so long as it does not anathematize fellow believers over issues that are truly non-issues.

The Psalmist speaks for all who will honour the Lord, when he writes:

‘I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.’

[PSALM 119:63]

Paul has counselled believers who would honour the Lord, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions” [ROMANS 14:1]. Again, the Apostle has written, “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up... Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” [ROMANS 15:1, 2, 7].

I recall my shock, my dismay at one church when a young woman sought to unite with the congregation. She wished to come into fellowship on the promise of a letter from a sister church. The request for a letter was given to the church clerk, who informed me, “We do not ask for church letters from anyone.” Then she added in conspiratorial tones, “You can’t trust them.”

I asked the Chairman of the Deacons to intervene; however, he made the same assertion, adding that neither did the church grant letters of dismissal. In effect, he condemned all churches as inferior to himself! By condemning all churches as inferior to the church over which he and the church clerk reigned, he ensured continued isolation of the congregation. It was the ultimate self-exaltation for these Preacher Eaters.

It is true that most churches are either ignorant of the responsibility of one church toward another in matters of communication; however, I have discovered through sad experience that there exists a large number of churches controlled by Preacher Eaters. These Preacher Eaters have convinced themselves that fellow Christians are untrustworthy without knowing them. They are prepared to condemn good people, refusing fellowship with them. I would say that it is a danger especially to unaffiliated congregations except I have witnessed the same malady among churches in co-operation within established denominations as well.

The Preacher Eater is a control freak. “Diotrephes ... also stops those who want to [welcome the brothers] and puts them out of the church.” We have an enigmatic picture of control over the brotherhood of believers. We can’t be certain of the specific incidents, but the best estimate of John’s reference is that itinerating evangelists or missionaries had come to the church ruled by Diotrephes. He showed them no hospitality. Then, to make matters worse, he put out of the church those who attempted to show hospitality to these itinerating servants. Clearly, he was a control freak, threatened by anyone whom he did not control.

Let me be very clear on this issue, because it poses a potential danger to a congregation. The elders have an obligation to defend the flock from error. In particular, elders are responsible to confront error and to denounce errant doctrine. However, elders must be careful not to insist that those who address the church agree with them concerning every jot and tittle. Frankly, no elder would ever have time to explore every minute aspect of doctrine represented within the Faith. Most elders focus on the broad range of doctrinal truth unless there is some indication of a serious error. Thus, they are broad hearted, open to sharing the preaching of the Word with those who love the Lord, gracious toward those of the Lord’s servants who seek His glory.

The Preacher Eater is Evil. “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.” John is quite pointed in stating that those who follow such practises as opposing those whom God appoints are evil. Being a control freak—especially within the assembly of the Lord—is characterised as “evil.” Isolating oneself from other Christians, speaking nonsense against divine authority and rejecting those whom God has put in authority are all evil. Especially, however, is it evil to embrace pride.

Pride, when it is tolerated within the assembly of the Lord, is utterly destructive. Fellowship is crippled, harmony is hindered, unity is destroyed when pride is permitted to find lodging within the congregation of Christ. Therefore, John makes it evident that the Preacher Eater is evil. Moreover, the Apostle is bold in declaring, “Whoever does evil has not seen God.” Underscore this tragic truth: those who do evil reveal their own character. Think of John’s repeated cautionary statements in a previous missive.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” [1 JOHN 1:8-10].

“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” [1 JOHN 2:9-11].

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” [1 JOHN 2:15].

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” [1 JOHN 3:4].

“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols” [1 JOHN 5:20, 21].

People who do what is evil and continue to live in a manner that fails to deal with evil demonstrate that they have no relationship to the Son of God. It matters not how religious they may be, the conduct of their lives reveals that they have never known God.

TOLERATING “PREACHER EATERS” — Let’s acknowledge a disturbing truth—preacher eaters could not exist if they were not tolerated by the churches they occupy and by the pastors they terrorise. Pastors tolerate these denizens of darkness because they are uncertain of their own authority and often because they view their labour as a job. Fearful of risking a paycheque, pastors tolerate the evil. Churches tolerate preacher eaters out of lethargy, ignorance or fear.

A controversial observation that is not frequently acknowledged from the pulpit is that to a sorrowful degree professing Christians are ignorant of the responsibilities they bear before the Lord. This dreadful condition grows out of willing ignorance of doctrine; and we pastors are complicit in this state of ignorance because we are negligent in presenting the deep truths of the Word of God to our flocks. Let’s be clear—we are negligent in teaching these truths because we fear a negative reaction from those in the pew should we speak the deep truths of God’s Word. Often, the preacher faces a mixed multitude occupying the pews. Such a rabble resists the preaching of the Word, rejecting such preaching as hurtful, as unpleasant or as unhelpful.

I have invested considerable time exploring the characteristics of the Preacher Eater for sound reasons. I want you to be informed so that you will not tolerate such evil when it does arise among you. I am endeavouring to warn you who listen against slipping into the trap of becoming such a wicked individual. It is my responsibility as a servant of the True and Living God to prepare you to recognise error and to resist error when it presents itself to the church. Beyond that, I want you to guard against permitting such individuals from usurping authority within the church. I do not wish you to witness the harm and injury that attend tolerating error within the assembly of the righteous. The drift into the error of tolerating preacher eaters is insidious, gradual and easily justified even by the godliest individual. Anyone of us can slide into such attitudes without meaning to do so.

Each member of the Body of Christ is placed therein by the Spirit of God. Moreover, each member of the Body is divinely gifted for the benefit of the Body; each member of the Body is a gift to the assembly wherein the Spirit has placed him or her. No less is the preacher one of God’s choice gifts to the congregation over which God has assigned him responsibility. Therefore, when a congregation permits the pastor to be chewed up and spit aside, the church is guilty of rejecting what God has given. That congregation has acted wickedly, not only in tolerating an insidious evil, but in permitting that evil to continue unchecked. There are consequences to our actions, and when we tolerate evil the consequences will be severe.

This leads me to state a disturbing truth—most professing Christians select the church they attend based on friendships, based on personal comfort or based on personal history. Too often, the professed people of God can articulate neither what they believe nor why they adhere to a particular doctrine or practise. After a very short time within a congregation, church members will cease all efforts to obtain clarity in doctrine in order to maintain what they mistakenly claim is fellowship.

I would be remiss in my duties as a herald of the Faith and a pastor if I did not issue the following cautionary statement to all who listen at this time. Christian fellowship must be founded on doctrine, if it is to continue. Fellowship, such as it is commonly supposed among the professed people of God, that is based on worship, based on likeability or based on shared activities, cannot survive the shifting pressures of daily life. Christians must not mistake uniformity for unity, nor senescence for saintliness. As Christians, we are responsible to know what God has said in His Word and to know how what He has said applies in our daily life.

I want to speak plainly to those who are church leaders, who imagine they are not leaders. You are in the congregation wherein God was pleased to place you. There, you bless others as you fulfil the tasks the Master assigned. Some of those tasks are quite public; other tasks are less obvious. However, each one has been appointed as God chose. What is vital to remember is that when evil is perpetuated among the people of God, if you permit it to go unchecked, you share in the wickedness. Without doing violence to the text, this is what is said when the Apostle writes, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 10, 11]. To tolerate evil is to participate in evil. James, the brother of our Lord, warns all who follow Jesus, “Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” [JAMES 4:17].

There is a warning from the lips of the Master that is undoubtedly applicable to this point. You will recall the exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders who were deeply offended at the healing of a man born blind. The account is provided in the ninth chapter of John’s Gospel. After the religious leaders had debarred the man who was healed from worshipping at the synagogue, he found Jesus. When he encountered Jesus, the man placed faith in him. Jesus responded to his faith by saying, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind” [JOHN 9:39]. Some Pharisees standing nearby were incensed that Jesus would make such a statement. They were almost spontaneous in their protests, “Are we also blind” [JOHN 9:40]? Listen closely to Jesus’ response. “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” [JOHN 9:41].

If you assert that you know the will of God and yet do what is evil, your actions place you in opposition to God. In that instance, you position yourself to receive His judgement. Whether you precipitated the pastoral roast, or merely remained silent while it was happening, you are responsible before God. If the pastor has sinned, there is a protocol for dealing with his sin. “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality” [1 TIMOTHY 5:19-21].

Pastoral sin is to be dealt with, but cautiously. Undoubtedly, the godly pastor will generate opposition from people steeped in sin and who enjoy their lack of accountability. God set in place protocols to ensure that charges brought against the elder were warranted. Without this divine protocol, the church degenerates into a voters’ union where the loudest voice prevails. Church members are not to participate in this evil through tolerating preacher eaters.

A WARNING TO “PREACHER EATERS” —John writes, “I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us” [3 JOHN 10]. The man of God will expose the Preacher Eater. Exposing the Preacher Eater will be accomplished through the preaching of the Word. When the evil is revealed, the people of God are responsible to act to remove the evil. Tragically, few churches within the evangelical Zion are prepared to act so decisively. Leadership has been reduced to a popularity contest rather than a matter of principled appointment by the Living God.

Few churches raise up pastors from within the congregation, choosing rather to “call” pastors (a form of democracy in which the prospective pastor sells himself and the people vote). One would be hard pressed to demonstrate democratic action based on what is written in the Word of God. In my years among the churches of our nation, I have learned a few things. One is that if a pastor will avoid trouble, he will make it a point to discover how decisions are made at a church where he is being considered, and determined whether self-appointed people call the shots there. That reign of error will almost always be conducted under the guise of democracy.

Let me share something with you from the American States. John Adams, the second President of the United States, wrote, “Democracy... while it lasts is more bloody than either aristocracy or monarchy. Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There is never a democracy that did not commit suicide.”⁶ The drive among the churches to be democratic is an effort which has no biblical support. The drive for democracy has the potential for grave harm with few benefits among the churches of our Master.

Similarly, Benjamin Franklin stated on one occasion, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.” What was true in the political realm is equally true in the spiritual realm. As a congregation ceases vigilance and begins to rely upon process rather than purity, masters will arise. Take note of what I’m about to say. Whenever a congregation is “run” by a church boss—a Preacher Eater—it is a sign of spiritual lassitude, religious languor, doctrinal deviancy.

One could wish that God would intervene and deal with these evil doers as He did on other occasions. Perhaps you will recall the divine response to those who thought to displace Moses. The account is provided in Numbers Sixteen. There, we read, “Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and 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 a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men [literally, “men of name,” or “men of renown”⁷]. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them [NUMBERS 16:1-3a].’”

Moses was horrified at this insolence. Falling on his face, he warned Korah and those aligned with him, “In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him... You have gone too far, sons of Levi” [NUMBERS 16:4, 5, 7]! Moreover, Moses warned, “It is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together” [NUMBERS 16:11].

The next day, the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels, together with their households, all those associated with them and all their goods. You may think this to be overly harsh. However, remind yourself that it was God who acted, not Moses. God is holy, and those who approach in an unholy manner must face His wrath.

⁶ <http://brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/johnadams136320.html>, accessed 7 July 2011

⁷ Footnote, **NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press 2006)

It is not the job of the preacher to fight the Preacher Eater. He can expose what is going on, but he is dependent upon the congregation to act. The congregation will have to fight through inertia born of lethargy, long standing ties of friendship and debt to the Preacher Eater and the natural revulsion against combat. Sheep are not fighters by nature. However, sheep must be prepared to defend themselves, rising above the inborn reticence. Though God does not immediately destroy the Preacher Eater, He will do so in due time. What is more important is the knowledge that the congregation is responsible to deal with such situations. Members of the congregation can stop the Preacher Eater in his tracks. The one opposing the Pastor will endeavour to do his dirty work secretly, quietly, behind the scenes. Like roaches, they don't want to be exposed to the light.

The Preacher Eater manipulates other members of the flock; he will use friendship, gifts, thoughtfulness, appointments and honours to curry favour with anyone whom he thinks he can use—deacons, teachers, officers of the church. The flock is so trusting of these wonderful people that they cannot imagine that they would ever do anything to hurt the church; but whether wittingly or unwittingly, the Preacher Eater is leading the congregation to destruction. Thus, like sheep, the members continue to mill about unalarmed even as the wolves harass the shepherd.

Let me free you by urging you to act godly, to accept responsibility to labour in the vineyard of the Lord. In a church business meeting, train yourself to ask important questions. “Who decided this?” “Pastor, is this what you want?” “Who is on that committee?” Preacher Eaters cannot stand exposure; they cannot stand knowing that people are onto them and aware of what they have been doing behind the scenes. Neither can they stand accountability. When the congregation begins to insist that decision makers report to the congregation on what is done and why it is done, it ensures a healthy congregation. Preacher Eaters bank on the fact that most church members want to be protected from the inner workings of their church—they want to be left alone. When even just a few members begin to be involved in the life of the Body, Preacher Eaters will shortly leave to find a “more spiritual church” where they can work.

Members of the congregation are responsible to turn on the lights, illuminating what is done and how it is accomplished. In doing so, they strengthen the Pastor; and they may just save the congregation. Candidly, when a congregation shrinks from shining the light on those termites that seek to destroy the foundations, there is little left for a preacher except to leave that congregation to its own devices. God will care for His congregation by stirring the flock to resist error, or He will write “Ichabod” across the front, permitting it to wither and die.

Let me say that I have not brought this message because I am facing one of these sons of Diotrefes; I am not aware either of overt or of covert manipulation or opposition ongoing among the membership of this assembly. However, I bring the message because it is vital to the long-term health of the congregation. With the Apostle, I want to be able to say to this congregation, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable” [ACTS 20:20]. My role is to equip you for righteousness, positioning you to advance the Kingdom of our Lord. My aim is “to present you as a pure virgin to Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:2].

The message also serves to warn anyone who may slip into temptation of thinking they can control or rule over the congregation of the Lord. Such action will be resisted, met with open exposure. It also serves to warn the congregation that if you fail to act when such exposure does occur, the consequences are certain. I long to know that the people of God serve the Son of God valiantly, vigorously advancing His Kingdom. That goal will only be met as God's people stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by their opponents [see PHILIPPIANS 1:27].

DEALING WITH THE PREACHER EATERS

If you are tempted to promote yourself, usurping authority over God's people, be warned that the Lord is holy—He will oppose you. Hear the Word of the Lord God, who has warned us, "We know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" [**HEBREWS 10:30, 31**].

Above all else, submit yourself to the reign of Christ the Lord. Embrace Him as ruler of your life. Believe the message that calls you to life. Believe that He died because of your sin, and that He was raised from the dead. Believing Him, receive the life that He alone gives. Amen.