

Tell it to the Church

The Church 2020

Matthew 18:15-20

Stuart W. Bryan

I. You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself (Lev 19:16-18 cf. Mk 12:28-34)

¹⁶You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

II. The Loving Process of Rebuke

Left unaddressed, sin is like cancer and can eat out the life of a church. So we need to know how to deal with sin. In Matthew 18, Jesus outlines four steps in the *loving* process of *rebuke*:

¹⁵“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ ¹⁷And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

A. Step One: Private Confrontation (15 cf. Lk 17:3-4; Gal 6:1)

In step one, we are to confront the brother in sin in an attempt to bring repentance and reconciliation: “Go and tell him his fault...” (15). In the words of Leviticus, “_____ him” (19:17). This confrontation is to be *private*: *go and tell him his fault between you and him alone*. Address the matter as privately and discretely as possible. Solomon writes, “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips” (Pr 20:19).

Peter reminds us that *love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Pet 4:8). *Love* confronts; but *love* also _____. There are times when we should just let something go.

- Before confronting, ask, “Have I examined myself yet?”
- Before confronting, ask, “How sure am I that I am right?”
- Before confronting, ask, “How important is this?”
- Before confronting, ask, “Does this person show a pattern of this kind of behavior?”
- Before confronting, ask, “What do wise people counsel me to do?”
- Before confronting, ask, “What else is going on in the other person’s world?”

If we cannot *overlook the transgression* in love, then Jesus insists that we must *confront the transgression* in love. As Paul writes in Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself lest you also be tempted.”

B. Step Two: Confirmation of the Accusation (16)

In the second step, we confirm the accusation. *“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”* (16). Jesus’ mention of *two or three witnesses* indicates that it is at this point that the legitimacy of the accusation is established (cf. Dt 17:6; 19:15; 1 Cor 5:13). Is the brother really in sin?

It is the role of the elders to listen to the witnesses and confirm whether the accused brother is guilty. It would be unjust for the elders to act on a mere accusation of guilt. If the brother is guilty and refuses to repent, then the elders should formally admonish him to repent and warn him of the dire consequences of refusing to do so.

C. Step Three: Suspension from Normal Fellowship (17a)

The third step is *Suspension from Normal Fellowship: “tell it to the Church.”* Paul alludes to this step in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14ff:

⁶But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us... ¹⁴And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

If someone *does not obey the apostolic word* (14), the church is to *note that person* – identify him _____ and state what he is doing wrong – *and do not keep company with him* (cf. 1 Cor 5:11). The goal for this action is redemptive: *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother* (15). We want him to be *“ashamed”* (14) and repent.

D. Step Four: Excommunication (17b-20)

If he will not listen to the Church, then he is to be to us *“like a heathen and a tax collector”* (Mt 18:17b). The brother is to be removed from the covenant community; he is no longer to be considered a _____ in need of correction but an _____ in need of evangelism (cf. Tit 3:10-11). The ultimate cause of excommunication is *contumacy* – a steadfast refusal to acknowledge one’s sin and turn from it.

We call this final stage of formal church discipline *excommunication*. As a covenantal rite, *excommunication* is a counterpart to _____. _____ incorporates the individual into the church; *excommunication* separates him from Christ and His people.

Rightly administered, both Suspension and Excommunication speak _____ Word to the sinner. Jesus entrusts His authority to the local, visible church: *“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven”* (Mt 18:18 NASB). The voice of the church ratifies that which God has already declared in His Word. This is why *witnesses* are required (18:19f).

III. Conclusion