

## Tell it to The Church

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"15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

"16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

"17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

"18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

"19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

"20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." [Matthew 18:15-20]

I contend that this Scripture passage teaches dispute resolution that can be used for disagreements over issues of doctrine.

The example from this day and age would include the disputes I had with my sister over doctrine. She went to one Christian church and I went to another. Her faith was more in line with Calvinist teaching while I leaned to a more Baptist and Charismatic.

My current understanding of this dispute resolution would be that as we could not work out our differences even with the assistance of others, we should have presented our case to the Church to let the Church decide. Then when we had the ruling of the Church we would each have the option of submitting or separating from the Church.

Let's look at the history of the Church as narrated in Scripture:

"1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

"2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." [Acts 15:1,2]

Here the Apostle Paul was not able to resolve the dispute over doctrine even though he personally failed to work it out even when multiple individuals were involved. They tried the formula of Matthew 18 of first confront one on one and then the second of working with a small group.

Here is the key issue; step three, tell it to the church.

Let's go back a little in the book of Acts to where Paul was sent out by the Church:

"1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

"2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul [Paul] for the work whereunto I have called them.

"3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

"4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus." [Acts 13:1-4]

Please note that it was "church that was at Antioch" that sent out Paul on his missionary ministry. When Paul decided to "tell it to the church", why did he not just tell it to the "church that was at Antioch" as that was the church that "sent them away"?

Apparently, Paul interpreted the procedure step from Matthew 18 to "tell it to the church" meant more than submitting it to just the local church. What was done in Acts 15 was that they would go "unto the apostles and elders about this question".

Now go back to my sister and I. We each held to the teachings of different churches. We were working that a church was simply an assembly of believers using the Scripture: "20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." [Matthew 18:20]

So if we were correct in our interpretation of what "tell it to the church" we would each be telling it to different churches and then get different answers as both my sister and I held views consistent with our respective church.

But Paul did not submit the issue to his local church but to the church consisting of the apostles and elders. And it was not just Paul that submitted the issue but also those who he was disputing with.

"4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

"5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

"6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." [Acts 15:4-6]

Note that in verses 4 and 5 the church at Jerusalem is involved with the presentation of both sides of the issue and yet in verse 6 it is just the "apostles and elders" that "came together for to consider of this matter".

Now maybe you could make the case that the church is just the assembly of any group of Christians but you can not say the same concerning the "apostles and elders". We can go back to Acts 2 to find the make up of the church:

"38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

"40 And with many other words did he testify and

exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

"41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

"42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." [Acts 2:38-]

It is very clear that in verse 41 that those that believed and baptized were "added" into the church.

But there is a great leap to say that the final decision making was thus left unto those simply added to the church. The Apostle Paul did not see it that way. He presented his case to the "apostles and elders".

So how does one become an "apostle"? We see clearly that elders are appointed by the apostles and those designated by the apostles.

"23 And when they [Paul] had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." [Acts 14:23]

"5 For this cause left I [Paul] thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:" [Titus 1:5]

There are only two examples of making apostles recorded in Scripture. The first is where Jesus makes twelve of His disciples to be Apostles:

"13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;" [Luke 6:13]

The second is where apostolic succession is established:

"15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

"16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David

spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

"17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

"18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

"19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

"20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

"21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

"22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

"23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

"24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

"25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

"26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." [Acts 1:15-26]

The significant item we cannot dismiss is that the role of the other apostles was critical in the determination of a new apostle.

So while membership in the church is open to all who believed and were baptized, the leadership of the church is limited to those appointed by the apostles along with the elders who were appointed by the apostles or appointed by those

designated by the apostles.

Let's go back to our first Scripture passage and deal with verse 18:

"18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [Matthew 20:18]

Can you say this applies to anyone in the church? Does it not specifically refer to the authority give by Jesus to those first twelve apostles?

The authority of the church thus flows downward from Jesus to the twelve apostles, their successors and those designated by them.

Thus we conclude that "tell it to the church" does not mean to tell it to a grouping of church members but to the leadership of the church that is directly connected to the leadership of that church established by Jesus when he appointed the twelve apostles.

But what about my sister? She and I looked to different local churches that were not in fellowship with any common leadership. Since the Apostle Paul could not convince his adversaries of Acts 15, how could anyone expect me to convince my sister or my sister to convince me? If it took the Apostle Paul appealing to the "apostles and elders" to resolve his dispute, how could my sister and I have resolved our dispute without the same avenue of appeal?

A few years ago, I sat down to breakfast with a local Baptist minister. I was from the north so I really did not have much understanding of the roots of the southern Baptist churches. I asked him when his denomination was founded. I was expecting a response that focused on the need to separate because of the civil war. I was literally shocked when he said his denomination started just two (2) years ago. He explained that there was a dispute among the churches of the previous denomination and the result was the formation of a new denomination.

What he did **not** say was: "We were wrong so we got together with a few other churches that were also wrong and formed our own denomination."

What he also did **not** say in words but the implication was clearly: "We were more spiritual so we got together with a few

other churches that were also more spiritual and formed our own denomination."

Now these were Bible believing Baptist who split. One group did not just reject the Bible but it was more of how one took the Bible and put it into practice.

What really confused me about this Baptist church is that I would come and visit when we living in New Jersey well before the split. Everything seemed fine to me then and after the split, every thing also seemed fine.

"Something is rotten in Denmark". That is a very famous quote. It applies here. The point is not just what is wrong just that something is wrong. The base problem is that the "apostles and elders" that Paul appealed to were not appealed to in order to resolve the dispute with the Baptist church nor with the dispute between my sister and I.

So who's fault is it? Did the apostles and elders all die out? Did the procedure of apostolic succession described in Acts 1 stop being utilized? Did "the apostles and elders" stop coming "together for to consider"?

There are some Christians who actually teach that if the Bible does not say something, it just did not happen. They say Peter did not go to Rome because the Bible never said he did? Well the Bible never recorded the death of Peter so is he still alive?