

Building a Christian Community "Admonish One Another" Romans 15:14

Introduction

This is the fourth lesson in our series on Building a Christian community. We are exploring what the New Testament says about why the Christian community is so important and what it looks like. John 13:34 is the base text which says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Jesus says the most compelling evidence that He is the Truth is not a slick marketing strategy or even persuasive apologetics; it is a community of people who know how to succeed in love relationships. As we have seen, the apostles took this to heart. In their letters, the disciples reinforced what it means to "love one another" as the Master loved them. They did this through several more specific "one another" imperatives.

The one we will explore today is "admonish one another." The Greek word for "admonish" means literally "to place on one's mind." It is also translated as "counsel," "warn," and "instruct." The Discovery Bible says that "admonishing" includes helping someone make the journey of thinking through an issue – from *premise to necessary conclusions (convictions)*, which rest on a *solid, scriptural foundation*. And I like this, admonishing makes *skillful* use of *logic*, *redirecting* someone's *reasoning* (thought-process) to find the Lord's approval.

Admonish is part of a group of words that Paul uses in 2 Tim. 4:2 when he says, Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. Admonition ranges from correcting the ignorant to rebuking the obstinate. It also addresses actions and attitudes, and even beliefs.

Like encouragement, admonishing seeks to express God's love by communicating the truth of scripture to meet a critical need. But unlike encouragement, which seeks to strengthen those under pressure through no fault of their own, admonition seeks to correct those who are damaging themselves and others by their own wrong choices. Biblical admonition is moral correction through confrontation that is motivated by genuine love.

There are many ways to admonish someone, ranging from a gently raised question to a very forceful rebuke. That makes admonition very unpopular in our culture. But why is this? Well, partly it's because so many dysfunctional families and religious groups have abused it. Our culture values individual rights above personal responsibilities and often rejects universal and absolute moral standards, which leaves us simply no basis for any moral correction. Sadly, this brand of "freedom" comes with a very high price tag.

You simply can't develop closeness without trust. Trust is rooted in knowing that we all are under a higher moral standard to which we must be willing to submit. Trust is the very reason why Christians have a basis for real community and successful close relationships.

Christians live under God's moral law rather than being a law unto ourselves. We know that God's moral law is an expression of his goodness, which makes us able to call each other to account out of loving concern. Paul envisions this in Col. 3:16 when he writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." [\(Colossians 3:16-17\)](#)

Paul writes these words to a group of Christians He had never visited! If we have God's Word to inform us and God's love to motivate us, we have the resources needed to admonish one another effectively.

This is especially important in marriage. Couples considering marriage should answer this question, "Are you both able to give and receive admonition to and from each other?" And here's a question for all of us! When was the last time someone admonished you? Are you involved enough with some of your Christian friends that they have admonished you at some point over the past several months? Are you connected enough to receive admonition from them?

I don't want to imply that this should characterize the tone of your relationships because there should always be a lot more encouragement than admonition. But in a healthy Christian community, admonition is essential. Is admonition a healthy part of your relationships with other Christians? If not, you are missing a crucial component for your own spiritual development, and you may even be betraying your friends.

What we hope to do is get the most out of admonition. Let's look at how we can apply this "one another" imperative and pursue an even deeper level of relationship.

I. Admonition Must Be Filled with Grace

To start with, we need to be filled with grace. We must consciously filter admonition through God's grace rather than interpreting it as a personal rejection. Do you enjoy being corrected? Even in the best scenario, it is a little embarrassing and painful.

But for some people, admonition feels more like personal rejection that threatens their very identity. The problem is compounded if you're unable to distinguish between your behavior and who you are as a person. If you've had to contend with abusive authority figures, you may have particular difficulty making this distinction.

But if you view admonition as rejection, you only experience more pain by rejecting a valuable reproof.

Here is where the person who lives under God's grace has a real advantage. If I know the Lord of All will never reject me, I can receive correction without being devastated. If I know that God's discipline is an expression of his love, I do not need to fear it, and I can profit from it. Listen to what the Hebrew writer says in Chapter 12, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "MY SON, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE REBUKED BY HIM; FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12: 4-15 NKJV)

Admonition is like cleaning a wound - you don't want anyone touching it or calling attention to it, but it must be cleaned to heal correctly. Admonition may sting at first, but later you always feel better. By God's healing grace, are you able to receive Christ's admonition?

II. Admonition Must Be Based on Truth

Secondly, admonition must be based on truth. We need to look for the truth when we are admonished rather than looking for excuses to reject it. This, of course, runs directly counter to our natural reaction.

Why is it we instantly and creatively create all kinds of reasons to discredit and reject rebuke? It's always easier to say, "How dare he say that to me when he has all kinds of sins! Who does he think he is?" or "I can't believe how insensitively she said that!" or "It's not really my fault--I acted that way because of how I was treated!" Even mature Christians still have these reactions. The challenge is not to act on them. Instead, we learn to go to God and prayerfully and humbly consider the validity of the admonition.

Why would we want to do this? It's because we want to maturity in Christ more than we want to preserve our own egos. If you insist on receiving admonition only directly from God or only from perfect people, you will remain a fool for the rest of your life. Proverbs 12:1 says, "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction *is* stupid." (Proverbs 12:1 NKJV)

If you love learning, you love the discipline that goes with it. Only the shortsighted refuse correction! We must get to the point where we can profit from correction, even from imperfect people! We value correction because we know God intends to help us, not hurt us.

III. Admonition Is Given For Our Benefit

Admonition should always be given for a person's benefit. Thank God for friends who love us enough to admonish us. Thank God for friends who love you enough to tell you the truth even when it is painful to hear.

Solomon says that wise people realize how valuable this is. In Proverbs 9:8, he writes, "Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise *man*, and he will love you. Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just *man*, and he will increase in learning. "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding. For by me, your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And *if* you scoff, you will bear *it* alone." ([Proverbs 9:8-12 NKJV](#))

You can try intimidating people to keep them from admonishing you or threaten them with retaliation. But the one who really loses is you. As you distance yourself from God's help and healthy closeness with people who really care for you, you become even more isolated from the help you need.

Admonishing others is really a sacrificial love because it costs you emotional energy, and (especially today) you are often risking your relationship with the other person to help them. But you do it because you are committed to the other person's welfare more than you are to their acceptance or treatment of you.

Unfortunately, there is no formula for effective admonition because it involves people and has so many variables. You need to consider the seriousness of the issue, the history of your relationship, their level of spiritual maturity, and the history of your discussion about the issue.

Conclusion

But some biblical principles will help us to be increasingly effective in this area. Let me suggest a few of the most important principles.

1. First of all, Pray - Prayerfully prepare beforehand instead of reacting impulsively.

Spontaneous admonition is rarely effective because we are usually reacting in anger. James warns us that "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). Correcting in unrighteous anger forfeits our moral authority and calls for an apology. So take the time to pray for the right attitude, perspective and wisdom, and God's empowering and conviction.

2. *Meet Face to Face – If you need to admonish do it in private and face-to-face if possible. However, sometimes a written letter is the way to go.*

Jesus says, "If your brother sins, reprove him in private (Matt. 18:15). Privacy is important because it makes it easier for the other person to not react defensively. If you correct a person in front of other people you can embarrass them and force them into a position of reaction. Face-to-face is important because you can read and ensure accurate communication. For this reason, email or snail mail is usually a poor avenue for admonition. If you have to write a letter, make sure you read it several times, have someone else read it, and let it sit a couple of days then read it again before you mail it. Writing a letter makes it easier for you to be harsh (because you don't have to face the person), and it makes it more difficult to ensure accurate communication (because it can't include non-verbals and you have to wait for a reply).

3. *Be direct and specific. Don't be vague, sarcastic, judging of motives, etc.*

Don't say, "I want to talk to you about something serious next week." This content is vague and your tone is cutting and sarcastic. If your spouse says, "I'd like to talk to you about your harshness with the kids lately," the conversation is focused and you can probably get somewhere. If I say, "I know you said that to hurt Bill," I have arrogantly judged your motives and needlessly aggravated the situation. If instead I say, "Could we talk about what you said to Bill?" I'll probably get a lot farther.

4. *Apply Scripture - It really helps if you ground your correction in God's Word.*

Paul says "All scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for . . . reproof, for correction . . . Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 3:16). This is important for several reasons. The goal is not simply to terminate poor behavior, but to help the person form proper convictions about their behavior before God--and this requires understanding his Word. Also, God's Word has the power to penetrate and convict that our personality and intelligence will never have. And finally, when we appeal to scripture, we are making it clear that we are not arrogantly touting a position of superiority because we are also under God's authority.

5. *Be Firm - Be as strong as necessary--but also be empathetic and constructive.*

Depending on many factors (the seriousness of the issue; how many times you have talked about it; etc.), you may need to express yourself with enough emotional volume to make your point. But if you do this, find a way to express empathy so you can't be easily dismissed as self-righteous. And whenever possible, be ready with some practical suggestions for help as soon as the other person expresses a willingness to change. This is what Paul emphasizes in Gal. 6:1, "Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin,

you who are spiritual should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

6. Be Patient - Except for very severe situations, *don't insist on immediate compliance--give time for reflection, God's conviction, etc.*

Some people just go for the jugular so they can be done with the situation. If you do that you're just focused on your own relief rather than on doing what it takes to help the other person to grow. This is why Paul reminds us to exercise patience when we admonish. It usually takes us some time to get past the initial bristling of our egos to hear God's voice. In most cases, if you're getting a lot of resistance and argument, it's better to say something like "Why don't you take some time to think and pray about this--and later we can finish our conversation at this." (And then don't forget to do it!)

Is it worth it? Is it worth it to receive admonition with humility--even when everything within you cries to reject it? Is it worth it to admonish others - as much prayer and wisdom and patience as it takes to be effective--even when everything within you would rather write them off or make them pay?

It depends on what you value most. If your highest priority is your own comfort, admonition is definitely not worth it. But if you value spiritual integrity before God and you genuinely care about healthy relationships with others, it's worth every sacrifice you will make. So don't back away from admonishing someone to be their best for the glory of God.