

Admonish One Another
Romans 15:14

As we continue in our study of the one another passages we come to a responsibility that is perhaps one of the most, if not the most difficult exhortation of all the passages we will consider. We find it in Romans 15:14 where I invite you to turn.

The Message – “Romans 15:14 - Personally, I've been completely satisfied with who you are and what you are doing. You seem to me to be well-motivated and well-instructed, quite capable of guiding and advising one another.”

The Phillips – “For myself I feel certain that you, my brothers, have real Christian character and experience, and that you are capable of keeping each other on the right road.”

Dr. Howard Hendricks shares a personal experience while a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

A particular student came to the seminary having graduated from one of the finest four-star Christian colleges in the nation. He was the product of a distinguished evangelical church and had a good personal grasp of the Scriptures. He came from a strong Christian family – the whole nine yards.

He had one problem; he was riding on his background rather than building on it. At seminary he was an acceptable student, but not outstanding. He suffered from a severe case of the blahs, turning in papers that would make better kindling than academic projects. He generally fritted away his time.

Toward the end of his four-year tour of divine duty, I had developed an excellent personal relationship with him and I called him into my office.

"Bill, I'm disappointed in you."

"Really, Prof, why?" His eyes widened and blinked.

"Well, I could be wrong but my evaluation of you is this: you are a ten-cylinder man operating on about three, and comparing yourself with others who have only two."

The atmosphere electrified. He flushed, stifled internal anger, and left. Apparently he felt he had been misunderstood and our friendship bond weakened. Upon reflection he cooled to thinking temperature. "Maybe Prof is right. Could it be that he's the only man who loves me enough to tell it like it is? He blew my cover."

In time our rapport was mended. Bill went on to become a military chaplain, serving with distinction and impact. One of the cherished letters in my file is from Bill, thanking me for caring enough to face him with my convictions. Counselors can often be cowards, not caring enough to confront. Probably the reason I was sensitive to Bill's problem is that I had walked the same street some years before.

Prior to graduation from Wheaton College, an administrator called me into his office and "read me the riot act." Every time I opened my mouth he told me to keep it shut. I, too, stormed out of his office, hotter than a hornet, only to reflect that he was really right. My conclusion: I finally met the first person in twenty-two years who loved me enough to look me in the eye and challenge me with my greatest problem -- an undisciplined tongue. In fact, in review I believe that flaw could have been fatal to my ministry. Another template had been furnished by the Spirit-controlled man who truly loved me, and who, like a good surgeon, was willing to hurt in order to heal.

Too often I have seen marriages go down the drain, relationships deteriorate to the point of destruction, people with glaring personal limitation go unchecked -- all because Christians who know precisely what is wrong will not love sufficiently to tackle the problem.

"I was afraid I would hurt their future," is one lame excuse. But that is exactly what happens.

My mind recalls the words of our Lord to Peter when he veered off course; it seems a harsh slash to the disciple who had a short time before confessed Him as Lord. "Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23) These words came from the lips of the One who loves with everlasting love.

A former pastor told me about his experience of sinking into an illicit sexual relationship. He said he felt like an exhausted swimmer battling alone in the pounding surf, unable to escape the strong undertow, about to go down for the last time. On shore he could see all the people of his church. Some were shaking their heads in weeping and despair; others were shouting and shaking their fists in anger and frustration. There were words of encouragement and gestures of good will. There they were, all lined up, watching and waiting for something to happen. Only one man stepped forward and risked everything to plunge into the water and help the victim to safety. Am I willing to be that man?

Howard & Jeanne Hendricks, Footprints

Let's read our passage once more and consider these points as it relates to admonition.

We'll look at the reason for admonition

We'll look at the reaction to admonition

We'll look at the requirement in admonition

Romans 15:14 "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another."

Let's begin by looking at the reason for admonition.

I. THE REASON FOR ADMONITION

First of all let's understand what admonition is. Webster's dictionary defines it this way: To caution against specific faults, to warn, to urge to change.

The Bible dictionary defines it this way: Literally it means putting to mind or to put in mind. It carries with it the idea of encouraging, warning, and advising. It is a comprehensive word for counseling. Here it means to come alongside another Christian for the purpose of providing spiritual and moral counsel. Admonition is not a spiritual gift but a responsibility of every Christian to encourage and strengthen others. It is not left up

solely to the pastor or deacons. Every Christians bears the responsibility to admonish, but that comes with some criteria which we'll consider in a moment.

Now, while some translations may use the word instruct, a word that implies teaching, it is more than just teaching.

Teaching generally implies giving positive truth. Admonition has in view things the person is doing that are wrong morally and biblically which require some warning.

The intent of admonition is to set right something that is wrong in the life of another Christian and it is to be done so in love, but done so hopefully in a way that will not provoke or embitter.

The two sons of Eli who were priests continued to commit egregious sins. Eli complained about their behavior but never admonished them in a way that would correct their behavior.

The purpose of admonition is not to regulate behavior, but rather to encourage spiritual growth, to reveal spiritual blind spots, to expose, even at times, what Jerry Bridges defines as "acceptable sins", those things in our life we tend to tolerate or overlook but which clearly are considered as sin in Scripture.

A boss may admonish an employee using the employee handbook.

A teacher may admonish a student based on the student handbook.

A coach may admonish an athlete using the rule book.

Paul is talking about admonishing others based on absolutes found in the Word of God with the understanding that it is the spiritually mature who does the admonishing.

Notice from our passage a couple of important points.

We note first of all that Paul is writing a commendation to the Romans. At the time of his writing he had never been to Rome, had never met these Christians, but was compelled by the Holy Spirit to write to them. He was commending them that they were full of goodness and complete in knowledge. We might say they showed signs of growing in their walk with Christ. What he had heard about them and their Christian walk had totally convinced him that they were qualified to admonish one another. It's in the perfect tense suggesting for him it's a settled conviction. He didn't have any qualms whatsoever about their spiritual maturity.

The second thing we note is that he refers to them as "brothers". That term doesn't describe a physical kinship they had with each other because they were related through blood ties. When my youngest brother calls me up he always starts out by saying "brother Howie, this is brother Al." We are brothers because we are in the same family.

Paul doesn't use the term "brothers" because they were from the same nationality. He was a Jew and they were Gentiles.

Paul's use of the word is in reference to their common faith in Christ and adoption into the family of God they were then related by the blood of Christ. The people he is writing to are fellow Christians. They were saved.

Now, let's turn our attention to the matter of admonition and the reason for it. Keeping in mind the idea of instructing for the purpose of correcting and encouraging spiritual growth, let's look at a couple of passages. Both passages we will read make it clear that this is in the context of believers.

Matthew 18:15

Galatians 6:1

In both of these verses we see that sin is the reason for confronting someone who has sinned.

It's not about preferences.

You know, you really shouldn't eat meat.

You know, it's okay to eat meat.

You know, you really should cut your hair.

You know, you really shouldn't wear make-up.

You know, you shouldn't do this or should do that.

The list can go on and on *ad nauseum*.

Scripture I think makes it clear that sin is the reason to admonish another believer. If we take seriously Peter's command to be holy because God is holy then we must admonish one another for the purpose of guiding others in spiritual maturity.

II Samuel 12:1-14

From the admonition of Nathan to David we have one of the great Psalms of repentance – Psalm 51. Nathan came to David and admonished him because of the sins he committed against Uriah in having him killed and the adultery he committed with Bathsheba.

David had committed specific sins for which he was guilty and needed to be admonished.

How about God's admonition to Adam and Eve following their sin of disobedience?

How about Jesus' admonition to Peter when he opposed the Lord?

How about Jesus' admonition to the churches in Revelation for their tolerance of sin or backslidden condition?

How about when Paul admonished the Corinthian church for their lack of unity or their conceit about spiritual gifts or lack of consideration for others during communion?

A clear reason to admonish is when we sin.

But let's face it, whether you are on the giving end or the receiving end, admonition is not fun and it's often not pretty. I think that's why it's often avoided and that leads us into our next point – the reaction to admonition.

II. THE REACTION TO ADMONITION

Let's consider first some negative reactions to admonition and there are plenty of reasons why we don't want to take on the responsibility.

A. The Reaction of Risk

We simply don't know how the person is going to respond. There is the risk of a big blow up.

Anger

Resentment

Bitterness

Gossip

Hatred

The loss of a longtime friendship

Keep in mind that admonition should typically happen between friends, but that's where the greater risk comes in. You run the risk of losing a friendship that you may have spent years developing. You've had a lot of shared experiences that may come to an end. Part of the issue is that in such close relationships you tend to begin to overlook things.

It's just the way they are.

It's their personality.

I don't want to hurt their feelings.

I don't want to offend them.

They don't do it very often.

I'm sure they didn't mean it.

Again, let's consider what Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1. "Anyone caught in a sin..."

The word caught means you were found with your hand in the proverbial cookie jar, like the Pharisees who brought the woman caught committing adultery to Jesus. The person is guilty, they were caught red handed.

But it also has another meaning. It literally means anyone caught by a sin. The idea is that someone is running from sin, but sin being faster, catches and

overtakes him. The word trespass used in the KJV carries the idea of being caught by the sin itself.

It was the mile relay at the regional meet. I was the anchor on the team. When I received the baton we were in the lead by about 10 yards. I got to the backstretch and the runner from the second place team caught me and overtook me. That's the idea being presented here by Paul in regard to sin.

We rationalize that our friendship is more important than confronting the person about a sin and we're not willing to run the risk of losing that so we keep our mouth shut. It's like the story I shared at the beginning about the guy who had an obvious short coming that no one was willing to address until he was an adult.

Think for a moment about the risk Nathan took with David. He was the king who held life and death in his hands. Nathan risked losing his life if he confronted David with his sin.

I think we risk far more by keeping silent.

B. The Reaction of Rejection

That's probably the obvious next reaction after risk. No one likes to feel rejection. Relationships are fragile as it is, so who wants to be rejected. It can put us in a tail spin. Rejection can cause discouragement and depression. We may even begin to avoid people or at minimum not get too close to anyone again just so we don't have to be rejected. Rejection is painful.

I want to tell you as a pastor it's not fun and it's not easy to admonish.

I have been rejected.

I have had people leave because they didn't like what I had to say about some sin.

I have felt the sting of gossip.

We all want to be liked and bringing up some sin

with the hope of restoration runs the risk of being rejected.

Akin to that is the idea of resistance.

C. The Reaction of Resistance

The person you admonish begins to push back, to rationalize behavior or make excuses for it. They become defensive. They don't like being confronted so rather than stand there and take it, they begin their own assault. They may try to point out your own shortcomings rather than own up to theirs. They push back by asking just who do you think you are?

They may be like the guy meeting with Dr. Hendricks and just storm out of the room, maybe slam a couple doors or leave in a big huff.

They resist the idea that their sin is hardly anything compared to the sin of someone else. They begin to cast blame elsewhere to try and take any heat off themselves.

Resistance may also take the form of leaving to go another church or finding a new set of friends where they aren't known and can be accepted for who they are in spite of their continued sin, but they only take it with them.

D. The Reaction of Retaliation

King Joash started out as a good king. Under the spiritual guidance of Jehoida the priest, he made many repairs to the Temple and brought the people back again to worship the Lord. Then something tragic happened. We find it in the Old Testament. II Chronicles 24:17-22

When you take the risk of admonishing someone they may retaliate in some way. They may intend to harm you in some way physically or emotionally.

I've been threatened with defamation of character.

Others have spread rumors about me. Their reaction is to retaliate.

Those are some negative reactions. How about positive reactions? We hope that when we confront someone that they will be receptive. All too often the initial reaction is negative. But after some cooling down, the person who wants to grow in their faith be receptive.

E. The Reaction of Receptivity

David was initially angered by the story told by Nathan until he heard that the story was about him. People may not like it when they are first admonished, but given time, serious introspection and admission the heart becomes receptive.

F. The Reaction of Repentance

That's where we find David. From his receptivity to the admonition flow the words of heartfelt repentance as he pours out his broken hearted grief over his sin. He not only asks forgiveness but the opportunity to teach others so they won't trespass against the Lord. In Psalm 51 we see the heart of someone who desires to grow in relationship with God. That's the hope in admonition that the person will see his or her sin and repent.

Repentance leads to the next positive reaction.

G. The Reaction of Restoration

Psalm 51:10, 12; 15 "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit with me...Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me...O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."

When Jesus spoke the words of admonition to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 it was with the hope, the desire for restoration that they might return to a

right relationship with Him. He pointed out where they had strayed from the course and how to return.

Gene Getz says “There is no greater sign of love than to risk rejection and broken relationships with others.”

Now even though we each have the responsibility to admonish one another Scripture provides some requirement on who can or should.

III. THE REQUIRMENT IN ADMONITION

A. The Criteria

Romans 15:14 – “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in (filled with) knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”

Galatians 6:1 – “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”

KJV reads “you who are spiritual”

From Romans 15:14 there are two criteria and from Galatians 6:1 we find the third.

1. We must be full of goodness

The word “goodness” speaks of high moral character and living.

Enoch walked with God.

Noah and Job were described as righteous.

Moses was a friend of God.

David was a man after God’s own heart.

It is the Christian quality of someone who is being led by the Spirit of God so that when God’s Spirit speaks through God’s Word they listen and do.

They are the person in Galatians 5:16 who walks or lives after the Spirit which results in not fulfilling the desires of the sinful nature.

Their walk is like that of Daniel – above reproach. Their faith is evident. They are full of goodness.

2. We must be complete in knowledge

This does not mean that we are a know it all when it comes to the Bible, but that we have a firm grasp on its truths. It means a knowledge that is gained by learning, effort and experience.

John MacArthur writes “When God’s Word rules our hearts, His Holy Spirit makes us ‘rich in the true wisdom’ and prepares us to admonish one another, to ‘teach and help one another along the right road.’”

We are able to rightly divide the Word of truth. This gives us a firm footing on which to admonish otherwise we risk admonition that is couched in preferences or using pop psychology rather than the authority of God’s Word.

3. We must be spiritual

This person must not be far from the Lord. They aren’t perfect but you know there is a spiritual quality to their life that gives them the right to speak and to be heard. A spiritual person is growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. This is not a person who presents an air or piety or superiority. The spiritual person is humble, understanding that he too could be caught in the same sin. They have taken the situation to the Lord in prayer asking for wisdom in addressing the person, asking for the person to have a receptive and repentant heart, asking for restoration and spiritual growth to occur. A spiritual person will approach the other in gentleness which is a fruit of the Spirit. A spiritual person has first examined his or her own life to repent of any sin which might hinder restoration.

The person with these criteria is qualified to admonish.

We are all called to admonish one another, which means we all have the responsibility to be qualified so that when admonition is required we can gently guide the person back into a right relationship with the Lord.

In Matthew 18 Jesus provides some insight into the context of how that is to be done.

B. The Context

1. Admonish Prayerfully

Spending time in prayer is a way of preparing your own heart first, evaluating your motive, praying for the heart of the person you need to speak to.

2. Admonish Privately

Go to the person alone. Matthew 18:15 says that if he hears you, you have won your brother. If the person does not listen there is another step.

3. Admonish Persistently

Acts 20:31

Two or three witnesses are to be taken with you. We see this in the example of Paul's persistence praying and warning believers in Ephesus for three years with tears. This shows us the depth of his heart.

4. Admonish Publicly

If repentance still does not occur then it is to be taken to the church.

5. Admonish By Putting Them Out

Finally, if the person still will not repent he or she is to be put out of the church. Even this is a form of admonition. It's the hope of them seeing how serious sin is and the need to repent and be restored.

If a person has been admonished but refuses to

repent and leaves, we are no longer bound to continue admonishing them but only to pray God's Spirit will move them to repentance.

Every Christian is to be concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of one another that we might grow in our walk with the Lord.

Here's the goal as Paul declares in Colossians 1:28-29. "We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me."

If we are unwilling to admonish one another in the spirit of love, then a spirit of complacency develops that begins to eat away at the church.

There is a type of jellyfish which lives on a rock from which it never moves. It feeds on a kind of seaweed which grows in the decayed tissues of its own organism. It doesn't even have to go anywhere to find food. Its body is its own food source but in so doing it literally eats itself up.

We must not become complacent but urge one another on to spiritual maturity. That means at times, the need to admonish one another. The goal isn't to point out sin, but to prepare us for spiritual growth. So begin with your own self-evaluation and a good time to do that is prior to taking communion. When we admonish someone we never know in so doing if someone will rise up and do great things for God.