

Admonish, Serve, Encourage

Shortly after we started attending a church several years ago I was asked to be on the fellowship Committee. I don't remember why but one day we were preparing for an event and my Pastor's wife and I had to run to the grocery store. On the way we got talking about women's behavior in general. I used a word to describe a certain kind of grouchy behavior with a word that she didn't think was appropriate. She said something like, "Well, I know just what you're talking about but as a Christian I wouldn't use that word to describe it." She had admonished me – and rightly so! She hadn't humiliated me before a crowd. She didn't let it go and come to me six weeks later after I might have said it ten more times. She humbly and pointedly told me about my sin. I have not used the word since. It was effective. Colossians 3:8 says we are to remove all filthy language from our lips.

We Christians all know that we are to love one another but the Bible calls us to take it a step further than that – we are to show it. If we want to really love and honor each other then we'll have to give a little more of ourselves to the work. We will have to admonish, serve, and encourage one another.

In Romans 15:14 Paul says, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another."

As a leader over women in the past I had several occasions where I had to admonish someone for sin. I never looked forward to it, in fact I have dreaded it each time. But, in the end, the relationship with the person was better and each time there was spiritual growth – and some of that was mine! I think it always helps my own spiritual

growth because before I would dare approach another person about a sin I had to stop and evaluate my own life and habits regarding the same area. That's not always easy or the results always pretty.

The verse I quoted for you was from the NASB. In it Paul tells the Romans, "you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another." In the NIV it also says full of goodness, complete in knowledge, but "competent to instruct one another". In my own bible I have a note that indicates that instruct and admonish could also be translated into counsel. Why is it that it feels better to be told to instruct or counsel than it does to be told to admonish?!

The goal for an end result of all of those words should be the same: The person would hear the message, the *warning*, that whatever they have said or done is sin and they would turn from it. It's a sign of love for that person and for our God when we're willing to help someone trapped in sin. If admonishment is done in the right spirit with the right motives, using an appropriate method, the person not living the life worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27) usually recognizes the risk you're taking. I tell people that I want them to do this for me. If anyone were ever to see me do something or hear me say something that is not worthy of Christ, I want them to tell me. I may not thank them profusely at that moment, but, hopefully, I would later because I'd see it as an act of love.

Admonishment is not really just instruction. It implies a definite exhortation, correction, or warning. The quote to admonish came from Romans 15. In Romans 14:13 Paul had told the Roman church to stop passing judgment on each other so this is a good follow through of that. It may seem like it's a contradiction on Paul's part to tell them not

to judge each other and then tell them to admonish or warn each other. How does one admonish without judging? I think we can find the answer in the text.

Paul started by complimenting the Roman Christians by saying that he was thoroughly convinced that they were “competent to admonish one another.” He spelled out why he thought that.

First, he said they were full of goodness. This apparently was Paul’s way of saying that I know you are living righteous and upright lives. They were basically willing to follow God’s commands. These Christians were, generally speaking, living holy and Christ-like lives. In other words, in fact in Jesus’ words, they were mature enough to make sure they had removed the plank from their own eye before they tried to remove the speck of sawdust from their brother’s eye.

A Christian who is sensitive and serious about their own walk with the Lord shows they are responsible enough and capable of admonishing another Christian. They have earned the right to warn someone who is exhibiting behavior or characteristics that violate the scriptures. This is one of the hardest of the commands to obey but it’s necessary for the growth and maturity of the body.

When admonishment is done biblically it isn’t “judging others.” The first person we have to judge is ourselves. We have to make sure our own act is clean before we try to help someone else clean up theirs. We will not be completely without sin but we can be without unconfessed sin if we are aware of it.

The second thing that Paul said to these Roman Christians was that they were “complete in knowledge.” This is knowledge of God’s word so the requirement is that if

we want to admonish someone else we need to have a good knowledge of scripture. Paul said their knowledge was complete.

Admonishment has to be based on the Word of God, His specific will and ways – not on what you or I think someone else ought to be doing. This is a place where we have to be very careful. We don't want to confuse absolutes and non-absolutes. I have a friend who God convicted of spending too much time on Computer games. Because of that conviction she plays no computer games at all. If she starts she spends hours wasting time. BUT, computer games may be just fine for me or you (though they are a trap). God convicted her and she needs to respond to that but she can't say that absolutely God doesn't want anyone anywhere to play computer games. But, if a man is caught in pornography or adultery we can go right to the scripture and show him why he must get himself out of those sins and that applies to all men. It's absolute. (Mt. 15:19-20; Acts 15:20; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Phil. 4:8)

We don't want to impose a standard that's contrary to scripture. Sometimes there may seem to be a fine line. The word I used with my Pastor's wife that day is a word accepted by the world but it certainly has cuss word written all over it and did not honor God or make me sound like a Christian. Though there's nothing specifically about the word in the Bible she was right to make me question it and take it before the Lord. He convicted me not to use it again.

Think about books and music. The Bible doesn't forbid us from reading novels and enjoying secular music. It does, however, tell us not to expose our minds to any impure or unrighteous things. (Philippians 4:8).

It's interesting to me that because I didn't grow up in a Bible believing church learning the rules of the church (as opposed to the scripture) I seem to have some freedom that some others don't feel. Some have attended churches that had added a ton of "don't do this" rules to what the scriptures say. We can't base our admonishments on anything we've taken from anywhere but the Bible. It requires a full knowledge of the Word of God. If you noticed I asked the question about three different ways in your lesson so we would grasp that the scriptures are the only standard that we can use to judge the behavior of another. The truth is that if we're not learning the scriptures well enough that we're able to admonish one another then we need to be admonished ourselves! (Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15)

Well, if we decide we're qualified then we have to know what the biblical process should be in order to confront someone's sin. We have to look at scriptural examples to get the guidelines.

First, the admonishment must be done with love and concern. In Acts 20 Paul called together the Ephesian elders on his way to Jerusalem. He was instructing or counseling them to be on guard against false teachers. He reminded them that for three years he had never stopped warning each of them day and night *with tears*. These men had no doubt that Paul's concern was out of love for them as brothers in Christ. They could have interpreted this as judgment for having let false teachers in but because of Paul's demonstration of love for them it wasn't even considered. Paul's persistent warnings and his tears were reflections of his concern for them.

Second, A Pastor may sometimes admonish corporately in a sermon just as Paul did with his letters but generally speaking an admonishment should be personal. When it's done corporately we have to hope and pray that the offenders will see themselves in the sermon. Though we're often convicted by a sermon there are people who just don't want to see it so they don't. The Bible does talk about a public rebuke but only after a personal confrontation and evidence of a continuation in sin is found. (Matthew 18:15-18). If we want someone to change they need to hear directly and understand that it's them we're talking to.

Third, According to Paul he had been admonishing the Ephesians night and day so this might need to be persistent if we keep seeing the same issue over and over again. It may even be about different problems. When one sin is gone another may become obvious. It's that onion principle, peel off the layers until the whole life has been surrendered to the Lord. (This is most often practiced on one of our children!)

Fourth, admonishment has to be done with the right motives. Again, Paul sets a great example. In 1 Corinthians 4:14 he wrote, "I am not writing this to shame you but to warn (admonish) you, as my dear children." There is no reason to humiliate or embarrass anyone, which is why personal is better and should be done before any public rebuke. The hope is certainly that if we – in love and privately – admonish a brother or sister in Christ, there will not be a need for public admonishment! Ultimately the motive needs to be that they would be reconciled with Christ. Isaiah 59:2 tells us that our sin separates us from God. As the family of Christ we should not want anyone to stay separated from Christ.

Fifth, we have to have the proper goal. Our only motive can be to help the person become more mature in Christ. Again, Paul in Colossians 1:28-29 wrote, “We proclaim Him, counseling (admonishing or warning) and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all energy He so powerfully works in me.

And last, admonishment has to be a natural result of proper functioning of the local body of Christ. Pretty much what we’ve talked about so far is corrective admonishment but there is also preventive admonishment. The bible tells us that we’re to warn each other to “stay away from sin.” Preventive warnings need to be consistent in the church as the body functions as a group. We need to be willing to speak up, say that we think – Biblically speaking – something that someone is planning or about to do is wrong. Paul refers to this in Colossians 3:16 where he says, “Let the Word of God dwell in you richly as you *teach and counsel* (admonish) one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

So, each one of us needs to evaluate our own lives checking to see if we are full of goodness and knowledge. In other words are we living holy and righteous lives before God? Do we know our Bibles well enough to approach someone about the particular issue they face? Am I reflecting the love and concern of Christ or do I want to see this person go down or pay? Am I angry? Am I willing to approach the person needing correction privately? Am I being persistent or am I being obnoxious or overbearing? Is my goal to build them up to complete them in Christ? Are you or am I willing and able to admonish a brother or sister caught in sin – how about our own children or believing husbands?

We cannot use having some issue of sin ourselves as an excuse not to do this or to prepare to do this. The Roman church had plenty of problems. They were judging each other. There were strong and weak in the body but Paul still said that he was “*convinced that they were full of goodness and knowledge, able to admonish one another.*”

So, let’s evaluate our own lives, confess our sin and turn from it. Then, let’s use whatever goodness and knowledge God has given us to help a brother or sister to grow in maturity before Christ! Let’s be willing to speak the truth in love. The one being admonished is accountable before God for their response.

If the tables are turned and we are the one receiving the admonishment then we need to humbly accept it as from the Lord. Respond gently and then pray about it. Do not respond defensively or harshly. Ask God to show you if what you’re doing displeases Him. If we know when we hear it that the person is right, that what we’re doing is sin, then go straight to 1 John 1:9 and confess that sin knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse you. Then thank the person for caring enough about you to speak to you. If we are not so sure then God will show us if we ask Him if what we’re doing is sin.

Okay, let’s talk about serving one another. Galatians 5:13. “*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*”

In these 25 words Paul connects freedom, service, and love. They are intricately tied together.

Love in the body of Christ is to have the affection and devotion of a family relationship and the commitment as if we were all individual parts of the human body where the best function comes when everyone does their own part.

So, with that kind of love Paul says that we're also called to be free. Galatians 5:1 says, For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Prior to their conversions the Galatians, like all people, were "prisoners of sin" (Gal. 3:22). The Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai did not set them free from sin it simply made them (and us) understand how sinful the old nature is. God then used the Law to lead us to Christ "that we might be justified by faith" according to Paul in Galatians 3:24, It is Christ who fulfilled the requirement of the law – which is death. So, Paul can say, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

I want to establish what this freedom does NOT include. First it does not mean that we are free to sin (Gal. 5:13). Apparently, some people who had heard Paul teach this concept had taken their freedom to do what ever they wanted. Paul quickly said you're free but not free to indulge the flesh. In Romans 6:1-2 he was dealing with the same or a very similar problem. He wrote to them, "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

So, freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin. Because of God's grace in salvation we're to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions but live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-14). That's what gives us freedom.

The second thing that this freedom *isn't* is a freedom from the old nature. Nowhere does the Bible tell us that we can become perfect as in totally free from sin- in this life. Christ died for our sin, this didn't eliminate the sinful nature. This is why Paul had to warn the Galatians – and through them us – not to indulge our sinful natures. If the

Galatian Christians no longer had a sin nature Paul wouldn't have had to warn them against indulging it!

The third (and last) thing that freedom *isn't* is freedom from serving or being a servant. Paul is really trying to teach the Galatian Christians what true freedom is and he says rather than using other people to serve our sinful natures we are to serve them in love. This literally says that we're to be slaves to each other.

Doesn't it seem contradictory to be free and to be a servant? This is one of those mysteries of Christianity. We are most free when we are focused on others rather than ourselves. Jesus talked about this when He said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for Me and for the Gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

Self-denial brings freedom?

We know that if we want to live in real freedom in Christ then we have to be totally committed to Him. It's only when we turn our lives over to Him that we experience the kind of freedom that the Bible talks about. The next step of commitment to Christ is commitment to each other. If we turn our lives over to Him, we turn it over to each other. This truth takes us right back to being a family of God. Being a servant of Christ brings us directly into the service of other believers. We're part of a body of which Christ is the head.

So, we're the family of God with a sin nature but that doesn't mean that we're doomed to yield to the desires of that nature. We all know that when the gospel penetrates a society, revealing that Christ died for their sin and the sins of all the world, people learn that they can "live by the Spirit" rather than their own sinful desires. There will be conflict

between the spirit and the flesh, even for the Christian but we and others who come to faith can choose which nature we'll serve. The Spirit can lead us if the Spirit is in us.

God has created us to be social creatures. Very few people ever choose to live an isolated life. Even God said almost from the very beginning, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Sin has certainly made human relationships complicated and distorted. If we look at this it's very interesting. Sin put man into bondage to himself and his sin. It also put each person in bondage to the selfishness of other people. Even in selfishness man couldn't live without others. We aren't capable of supplying everything we need for life without some help. Even the pagan world is dependent on each other to some degree for physical survival. You see there's no such thing as "total freedom." Until Christ there was no alternative to selfishness. He came and introduced a way to love, to put others before ourselves.

All people must serve one another in order to survive, and though we all have a sinful nature, there is a way to serve each other that actually sets us free. This way will create lasting and satisfying relationships. It is the way of Christ, the way of love.

When we profess faith in Christ's death and resurrection we're set free from the domination of our sinful nature. Rather than serving one another selfishly, we are now able to serve one another in love. Paul calls this kind of service the "fruit of the Spirit." In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul runs down a list of the fruits of the sinful nature: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. Then in verses 22-23 he runs down the list of the fruit of the Spirit. When we serve one another in love we are expressing the love that God calls us to have for each other. There are also expressions of joy. There's peace, which is true

unity in the body of Christ. There is patience with one another. There's kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul wrote that all of these are the results of people in relationship who aren't serving selfishly but rather they're serving one another in love. When we live by the Spirit we keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

So, serving is necessary, a must because we can't live without each other. The Christian is to serve in love and not just out of a selfish desire to have their own needs met. We are free in Christ but not free from responsibility to serve others in the family of God and to serve them with a motivation to show love to them.

We are to be servants of one another. It's in serving one another that we find that true freedom in Christ. Our deepest needs will be met in legitimate ways, we'll use the gifts God has given us to serve one another. We won't be used by one another. This isn't about a performance standard. When we serve each other in love our relationships can be truly satisfying and enduring. That is true freedom for social creatures obeying God's commands.

Practically speaking what does this look like in the church? Certainly we will face selfish Christians. If these people think they can manipulate the church into doing all their work, they might just do it. We can all remember a person or two who comes through our church's doors and taps us for all we're worth and then when the well runs dry because we catch on to the one-sided relationships they have – they leave and go to the next church. Let's not talk about them because they keep us from dealing with each other. Let's talk about solid - serving the church - members of the local congregation who come by a time of need – maybe it's not even all that big a deal. A surgery or injury that causes them to

require 6 or 8 weeks of intense help. Would you and I step up to the plate and offer our services? What about the unlovely person who just needs a warm greeting on Sunday morning? Aren't we serving that person when we offer that greeting? How about the one who needs to be driven somewhere or needs a meal or perhaps they need to be admonished for their sin? Are you and I willing to put ourselves out there, to put time, energy, and maybe even a little cash out there to serve a brother or sister in need?

In our relationships are we displaying the sinful nature in selfishness or are we displaying the fruit of the Spirit? Listen to these questions and answer them regarding yourself, none of that "'wish Susie Jones was here to hear this, let's search our own hearts on these!'"

Are you and I expressing Christian love to others in this body of believers?

Do we show any evidence of joy or happiness?

Is there a spirit of peace and unity with others in the church?

Do you and I have patience with our brothers and sisters in our congregation

Are we kind in actions? How about attitude that no one else sees?

Are you and I doing concrete acts of goodness for others in the body? Do we fill a need we see or do we think, "Wow, hope someone's doing something about that!"

Are we trustworthy? If we say that we'll help, do we do it? If we say that we'll pray do we pray? If we say we'll be there do we go? Is our yes, yes, and our no, no?

Are you and I demonstrating gentleness, which I would define as sensitivity to the needs of others in your church?

Are you and I self-controlled in our conversations with our church family? How about in our general lifestyle, is there anything that we're doing in excess to such a degree

that it inhibits our ability to serve others (time on the computer, shopping, crafts, money, sports)?

And lastly, what are we doing that we could classify as serving one another?

(These questions are adapted from “Building Up One Another” by Gene A. Getz)

We are also called to encourage one another.. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Encouraging Christians was one of Paul’s major concerns. He adopted a strategy of trying to encourage every other Christian that he saw or wrote to to develop this same concern for all other Christians. (Colossians 2:2, 4:8)

Just read to these verses. First, Colossians 2:1-2, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.”

Oh, that we would have such an burden for sisters and brothers in our own churches no less those we’ve never seen face to face!!

Now Colossians 4:8, “I have sent him (talking about Tychicus) to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.”

Paul’s concern was always that Christians would build up one another, that’s what he encouraged them to do – in love. And so, Paul’s exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 to encourage and build each other up is a fitting way for us to end today. This is in his first letter to them and apparently it was a dynamic church. They were experiencing some trials and persecution and they were yet to face the problem of some doctrinal trouble that he

addresses in his second letter to them. He commends them for their love and concern for each other. They had already learned the importance of mutual encouragement, exhortation, and comfort. He said this is good, you're doing well, but keep at it. Remember we said that this is work, it requires effort!

In his book, *Building Up One Another*, by Gene Getz, he points out the word in the Greek for encouragement is also the word used other places for admonish or to teach. It's also translated "to beg, entreat or beseech" or, as it's used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, to encourage, console, comfort." Basically the word is always used to describe functions that help to build up the body in Christ, or to help build up one another in Christ. This is what Paul wants from the Thessalonian Christians.

There is one primary means that we can use to encourage each other – God's Truth, His word. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells the Ephesians to "speak the truth in love" then he says "we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ."

Let's look at a couple of biblical examples of this kind of encouragement. Paul wrote to Titus giving him the qualifications for elders. In that letter he emphasized that a pastoral leader, "Must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." Titus 1:9

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he charged him to "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction." Timothy 4:2

He said when he was discipling the Thessalonians with Silas and Timothy that they dealt with each one of them "as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging them to live lives worthy of God." (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12) Paul

makes it clear that “encouraging them to live lives worthy of God” is the kind of encouragement that every Christian needs.

In other places in his letters to the Thessalonians he answered some of their questions about the dead in Christ, the truth regarding the Rapture, and the day of the Lord by telling them to “encourage each other with these words.” “Encourage one another and build each other up.” “Stand firm and hold to the teachings.” He said to them that God in His grace had given them eternal encouragement and good hope. He said let that “encourage and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”

God’s word is powerful, eternal, significant, reassuring. It can offer us security, comfort, assurance of our salvation, hope, and forgiveness, let’s face it, it’s downright encouraging for the believer!

The fact that God’s word is eternal is what makes it so powerful and significant in our lives. We aren’t sharing some human philosophy or psycho-babble. These are not temporal concepts and ideas that are limited in space and time. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.”

So, God’s word is to be the primary means that we’re to use to encourage one another and to build one another up. Do you and I know it well enough to use it? Are we living lives that are so full of goodness and the knowledge of God and His word that we’re even qualified to admonish, to serve, and to encourage one another in love?

It’s one thing to be qualified, it’s entirely another thing to be *willing*. Are you and I *willing* to build up the body of Christ by using God’s Word to admonish, to serve, and to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ?

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