

Admonish One Another Romans 15:1-14

And I myself am also persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.

Romans 15:14, KJV

Introduction

I myself—that is, I of myself, without the testimony of others. Paul had himself such knowledge of the leading members of the church of Rome that he did not need to be informed by others about their true character.

Paul knew some things about these people, and that is why he was able to say with confidence that they were full of goodness and knowledge and able to admonish one another (v.14).

Let's consider what 'admonishment' is, who is qualified to admonish, and how believers are to admonish one another.

I. WHAT IS ADMONISHMENT?

Translators use various words to describe Paul's injunction to the Roman Christians. As we've seen, the *New American Standard Bible* reads "admonish one another." Williams uses the phrase "*counsel one another.*" And the *New International Version* reads: "competent to *instruct* one another."

According to the *Lexicon*, the word *noutheteo* doesn't refer to casual communication or normal teaching and counseling. **It implies a definite exhortation, a correction.**¹ ***That is, to provide counsel about proper behavior, and thus often the notion of warning*** (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 14; 2 Thess. 3:15).²

The tendency to be complacent is natural and must be fought continually. The Christian life is a race to be run, a battle to be fought. It calls for discipline, drive and determination. Hence, the need for constant admonition. By it we can save a brother from much harm and grief. We need Christian leaders and friends who observe our wanderings, then come to us in love (and in private), to warn and restore the wayward. Charles Spurgeon said:

"It is a precious doctrine that the saints are safe, but it is a damnable inference from it that they may live as they please. It is a glorious truth that God will keep His people, but is an abominable falsehood that sin will do them no harm. Remember that God gives us liberty, not license, and while He gives protection, He will not allow presumption."

¹Νουθετέω (*noutheteō*) means literally to put something into someone's mind, i.e., "to instruct"; but it often means instruction in the sense of "admonish, warn, reprimand, rebuke," especially with reference to moral training (see Col 1:28; see Spicq, *Lexicon*, 2:548–551).

²Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 536.

Paul's exhortation to "*admonish one another*" in this Letter to the Romans is a divine balance to his instructions to "accept one another." It may appear that we are to "accept" a person's sinful behavior. Not at all! **We can "accept the sinner" without "accepting his sin."** By accepting others as Christ accepted us, we earn the right to admonish others who are straying from the straight and narrow path.

All of us need occasional, loving admonition. **The problem is, either believers do not know each other well enough to do so, or they are not spiritually mature enough to do it properly.** So let's talk now about some qualifications and requirements of proper admonishing.

II. WHOIS "COMPETENT" TO ADMONISH OTHERS?

Paul complimented these Roman Christians by letting them know he was thoroughly convinced that they were "*competent to instruct [or admonish] one another.*" He spelled out why he felt this way.

A. They were "full of goodness" (Rom. 15:14a).

"Goodness" (*cf.* Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:11) **is that virtue opposed to all that is mean and evil and includes uprightness, kindness, and beneficence of heart and life.**³ It is the desire to aid and assist others in need; a good will toward others that propels you out of self-interest and toward them.

Paul expressed his confidence in their basic spirituality, in their own progress in becoming like Jesus Christ. Though they weren't perfect, they were mature enough to make sure they had removed the "plank" (log) from their own eyes before they tried to remove the "speck of sawdust" (mote) from a brother's eye (Matt. 7:3-5).

Christians who are sensitive about their own walk with God are capable to admonish other Christians. Putting it another way, **we must make sure we "clean up our own act" before we try to help others clean up theirs.** If we do this according to biblical guidelines, it will not spill over into judgmentalism.

The old adage that you shouldn't judge a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes has some merit. If you don't really know someone then you can't know all that may be lying behind their attitudes or their actions. Until you know the facts, you are in no place to admonish them. The only exception to that, is if you can see very clearly that there is scriptural principle being violated. This brings up the next point.

³ Goodness is the quality which will constrain the strong to refrain from what will injure the weak and knowledge is the attainment that will correct weakness of faith. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 209. **Jay Adams:** Goodness means not so much the quality of life that you live (though certainly that is presupposed) but rather a good-hearted attitude of concern for others. It is the desire to aid and assist others in need; a good will toward others that propels you out of self-interest and toward them.

B. They were “filled with all knowledge” (Rom. 15:14b).

The second requirement for being able to admonish others is an adequate knowledge of God’s Word. The Roman Christians were diligent students. Paul says that they were “filled with all knowledge” (v. 14b) and uses a word signifying knowledge gained by learning and effort. Just as the Roman church made itself familiar with the great doctrines of the faith, so all Christians need to master apostolic truth (cf. Acts 2:41-42).

Paul’s commendation of the Romans’ *goodness* and *knowledge* together is a rebuke to those Christians who deliberately deemphasize doctrine and focus entirely on loving interpersonal relationships as the essence of Christianity. **Love and truth are inseparable.** The issue is not either-or, but both-and.

The point is, **Admonishment must be based on God’s specific will and ways—not on what we think other Christians should or should not be doing.**

We must know the difference between the absolutes of God’s Word and the non-absolutes of society and our own preferences. We have to be careful and watch out for extra-biblical knowledge and cultural Christianity.

Most admonishment that goes on is ‘*here is what I think you are doing wrong and what I think you should do*’. (E.g. you must home-school your children! You must be a vegan!) **Thus, it’s important to realize that when we admonish other Christians, it should be based on scriptural lists of sins, not a list that we have added to the Bible.**

III. HOW SHOULD WE ADMONISH OTHERS?

Fortunately the Bible gives us examples and guidelines that help us to carry out the ministry of admonishment.

A. Admonishment must be done with love and gentleness.

We are to admonish with love and gentleness (Gal. 6:1). We approach an erring friend not self-righteously, but rather as a fellow-traveler, openly owning our own weaknesses and struggles, while expressing genuine concern.

B. Admonishment must frequently be personal.

That means I go to you personally and privately. Jesus says in Matthew 18:15: “*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.*”

Paul did this when he wrote his letters to various churches. But Paul also reminded the Ephesian elders that he had warned *each of them* – see 1 Thes. 2:11-12.

Having said this, we also remember that the Bible does speak about “public rebuke,” but only after personal confrontation and sufficient evidence of continual sin is given by two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:19).

C. Admonishment must be persistent.

This kind of exhortation must be continual if it is to be effective. **Note again that Paul’s admonishment to the Ephesians was “night and day” and for a period of**

“three years.” The Word of God is filled with a multitude of exhortations, warnings, and reminders.

D. Admonishment must flow from pure motives.

Most of what passes for admonishment these days is not done with pure, biblical motives. Again Paul serves as a great example. To the Corinthians he wrote: *“I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn [admonish] you, as my dear children”* (1 Cor. 4:14). **We must do all we can to avoid embarrassing people—even those who are guilty.** This is why personal confrontation should precede public confrontation. If an erring brother or sister is admonished privately and in Christian love, the need for public admonishment is often eliminated.

E. Admonishment must have the proper goal.

There should be only one basic objective when we admonish others: to help them become more mature in Jesus Christ. Read Colossians 1:28-29; Ephesians 4:13-15. That is the only purpose that is worthy of Christ.

With these cautions in mind, we need to exercise this ministry of rebuke and admonition, recognizing that God has entrusted such a ministry to all of us.

IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Each of us must evaluate our own lives before trying to admonish others. The following questions will serve as personal criteria:

1. Can I say my own life is “full of goodness and knowledge (of scripture)”?
2. When I exhort or admonish another Christian (or Christians), do I do so with deep love and gentleness?
3. When a Christian needs admonishment regarding specific sins, do I seek that person out in private?
4. Am I persistent in my admonishment without being obnoxious and overbearing?
5. Do I admonish others—not to tear them down and embarrass them—but to build them up?
6. Do I admonish others for one basic purpose—to help them become mature in Christ?

CHALLENGE

Note in closing,

- 1) The importance of Admonishment, one that is greatly neglected in today’s church. We would much rather talk to others *about* the one with the problem than *to* the one with the problem.
- 2) Admonishment is a means that the Holy Spirit uses for the well-being of a Christian brother or sister.
- 3) No individual, regardless of office, or stature, or reputation, is beyond the necessity of reproof.

We must be willing to humble ourselves when someone rightly rebukes us (Psalm 141:5). Husbands must be willing for their wives to admonish them. Their headship as husbands does not exempt them from receiving a rebuke from their wives. All of us must be open to any brother's or sister's admonition.

Sometimes you will be unconvinced by the admonition. Rather than respond defensively, thank the person for the rebuke and offer to pray about it. Other times, you will know the rebuke is deserved. Say, 'You are right. Thank you, forgive me.'

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read Romans 15:14. What is the relationship between "admonishing one another" and "accepting one another"? (Rom. 15:7)
2. How would you define "admonishing one another"? Give some specific examples to illustrate your definition.
3. Based on Romans 15:14, how competent are the believers in your church to admonish one another? How competent are you?
4. Why must we "earn the right" to admonish someone else? How willing are you to offer admonition? How willing are you to receive it?
5. Read Acts 20:31. What was the meaning of Paul's admonishing believers "in tears"? How can you keep your motivation pure?
6. Why is personal admonition most effective? When should it move to involve the church as a whole?
7. Is admonition in your church mainly preventive or mainly corrective? How has this small group been a form of "preventive admonishing" in your life?