

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 3
Practical Issues
Week 4 – Encouragement & Admonition

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

Encouragement and Admonition

Beyond areas of uniformity in ministry and exercising your gift, another key area of expressing biblical love in your home group involves the way you interact with other Christians. Paul challenged the Ephesians to speak the truth in love:

(Eph. 4:15) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,

When Christians communicate God's truth to one another with an attitude of genuine love, this creates a climate conducive to spiritual growth.

Speaking the truth in love involves many things, but its primary components are *encouragement* and *admonition*.

(1 Thess. 5:14*) And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.

These two “one another” imperatives are the verbal ones that are mentioned most frequently in the epistles (see 1 Thes. 5:14*). Each recognizes a key need of Christians, and each seeks to meet that need by communicating a key portion of God's truth, as we will see. If we commit ourselves to become adept at these, we will build the foundation of an effective, Spirit-led ministry.

The importance of encouragement and admonition

Both encouragement and admonition characterize healthy Christian friendships, marriages, and home groups.

	Our Problem	God's Remedy	Definition
ENCOURAGEMENT	We are weak and live in a broken and hostile world	Strengthen us by communicating God's indicatives/promises from the Bible.	Communication of God's truth in love in ways that strengthen Christians to go on following God's will.
ADMONITION	We are sinful and prone to self-deception, and live in a world designed to seduce us from God.	Seeks to correct them by communicating God's imperatives/commands.	Moral correction through verbal confrontation which is motivated by love.

Encouraging one another

***Parakaleo* comes from the root *kaleo* ("to call") and the preposition *para* ("around"). Thus, the word means "to call alongside," or "to call to or for." It was sometimes used in extra-biblical Greek to describe military situations in which soldiers were strengthened to fight on in battle.**

Like all words, *parakaleo* has a fairly wide semantic range. In the New Testament, it is translated "appeal," "exhort," "console," "comfort," "help(er)," "entreat," "urge."

Four Types of Encouragement: What does encouragement look like? Encouragement as it is demonstrated in the Bible has at least four faces:

1. *Expressing belief in one's position and potential in Christ.*

All of us struggle to one degree or another with viewing ourselves as losers, defined by our flaws and destined for mediocrity at best. If you were raised in a home in which your parents told you that you were "bad, stupid," etc., you may struggle with this more than others. The sad thing is, believing this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy—if you view yourself as a loser, you tend to live like one, which makes it easier to view yourself this way, etc. Or you may react by becoming a super-accomplisher ("I'll show them I'm worth something"), but still feel empty and worthless anyway.

Affirmation of position: Paul does this with the Corinthians:

(1 Cor. 1:2-9) "to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you

are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Affirmation of potential: One of the most potent expressions of encouragement communicates God's view of our potential. Jesus did this with Peter in **John 1:42**. When Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Jesus "gazed intently" (*emblepo*) at Peter. John uses this word to emphasize that Jesus discerned Peter's character, with all his weaknesses.

"Your name is Simon, but you shall be called Cephas." "Simon" was associated with Simeon of Gen. 49:5, who was rash and impulsive. "Cephas" is the Aramaic word for "rock" (Greek is *petros*). Jesus is saying, "I know you are named appropriately because you are rash and impulsive—but if you follow me you will become a rock."

It was this kind of encouragement that changed Peter's life: gradually, he began to act more and more like what Jesus said he was.

Oswald Sanders: "You don't even know who is sitting in your own seat, let alone who is sitting next to you."

2. *Recognizing significant accomplishments.*

All humans have an innate need to know that their accomplishments matter, that they are having positive impact in the world. Although we can become more self-confident in this area over time, no one outgrows the need to know this.

According to a recent New York Times survey, the #1 desire of employees, outranking salary raises and working conditions, was recognition of their work. This is why Kenneth Blanchard, author of the *One Minute Manager* series, says that one of the keys to effective management is to "catch someone doing something right and tell them about it."

Young children, unless they receive this, don't develop the confidence to explore the world around them (PARENTS WITH CHILDREN LEARNING TO WALK: we get excited about any *attempt* to walk and that encourages the child).

Research demonstrates that you can extinguish undesired behavior through punishment, but you can't promote desired behavior through punishment – you must reward or positively reinforce desired behavior.

Psychologists call this "operant conditioning"—positively reinforcing desired behavior when you observe it. Although we don't accept the rest of Skinnerian or behaviorist psychology.

Young Christians especially need this as they learn how to walk with Christ. They are so acutely aware of how little they know the Bible and how different it is to try to serve God, that they need this desperately. Meanwhile, most of us tend to see the negative things about others . . .

This is especially true of adults already in careers. If they don't receive encouragement, they will be strongly tempted to quit and retreat to their careers where they already feel competent and get recognition.

Paul was a master encourager and it is one of the keys to his great leadership. People are drawn to those who notice significant accomplishments and recognize them sincerely.

Read 1 Thes. 1:2-8 for an example of this.

(1 Thes. 1:2-8) "2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

Paul was prematurely separated from these brand-new Christians. Notice how he goes out of his way to point out their steps to follow Christ (vs 3,6-8).

Paul did this with Philemon.

(Philemon 1:4-7) "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; 6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

How is this different from flattery or manipulation?

- *You are telling the truth, not making things up.* Those whose praise we value most are also willing to critique (COACHES).
- *You are praising with a sincere motive to love them and help them glorify Christ*—not because you want to use them for a selfish advantage.

3. *Communicating God's faithfulness to the fallen and hurting.*

If we are committed to honestly facing ourselves and the world around us, we are going to see and experience things that threaten to overwhelm us (DEATH OF LOVED ONES; HEALTH PROBLEMS; SELF-REVELATION; DISAPPOINTMENTS; AGONIZING CONFLICT). How do we typically respond to these trials? We may withdraw, blame others, become fatalistic or cynical, or develop "Pollyanna" denial ("It's really no problem."). But what we need is to keep our eyes wide open to reality, and receive encouragement!

(Gal. 6:2) Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

Gal. 6:2 says we need to be willing to help those who are weighed down by heavy loads (*baros* - contrast to *phortion* in vs 5). Paul says this is a key way of fulfilling Christ's new commandment (Jn. 13:34,35).

We need to express empathy and sympathy (Rom. 12:15), while we communicate the biblical perspective.

Paul expresses empathy toward Christians at Thessalonica whose loved ones had died, and then reminds them about the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:14,18). We should express empathy when someone experiences a tragic accident or health problem, but then lovingly remind them of Romans 5:3-5; 8:28-39; Heb. 13:5; etc. We should empathize with Christians who are realizing how much more sinful they are than they realized, but then also remind them that this is part of the breaking process (Rom. 7; 2 Cor. 4,12).

(1 Thess. 4:14,18) - For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus...Therefore comfort one another with these words.

We need to realize our tendency. Do we tend to simply give truth without expressing empathy or do we tend to empathize, but never get around to reminding people of what God says (indicatives)? We should identify our tendency and correct for it.

4. *Exhorting Christians to go on following Christ despite pain.*

The previous form of encouragement applies to Christians who have been "struck down." This applies to Christians who are walking/serving, but are now fatigued or encountering stiffer opposition than they expected. It is almost the transition toward admonition because there is a tone of the imperative or command associated with it.

When MARATHON RUNNERS hit the "wall," having loved ones urge them on helps them finish the race. Likewise, when we hit "walls," we need others to encourage us to press on and not quit.

(Heb. 12:11-13) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

(Gal. 6:9,10) And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

(1 Peter 5:9,10) But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

We need to be reminded of the benefits if we stick it out and the negative consequences of dropping out of the race.

How To Become An Effective Encourager

- *Be willing to receive encouragement.*

Some of us are too proud to receive, or even to ask for some encouragement from others when we are hurting. But we are members of one another, and since God has decided to give much of his encouragement through other Christians, we need to acknowledge our weaknesses and come forward for help. There is no virtue in slowly bleeding to death spiritually when we could more quickly be restored by receiving some encouragement. (See 1 Thes. 5:14)

Qualification: Those who are quick to demand that others make them feel loved, etc. should not abuse this principle! This is a form of idolatry, because we are demanding that other people make us feel secure, loved, significant, etc. Are you thankful to God when he graciously sends someone to encourage you, or are you angry at people who fail to make you feel better? God may sovereignly withhold human encouragement from us when we have this attitude, so we will learn to depend on him more deeply.

- *Take creative initiative.*

(Heb. 10:24,25*) and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Those who are effective in encouragement spend time prayerfully reflecting on this issue when they are *not* with the person.

Edification goals for home group: This is one of the keys to an edifying atmosphere vs. a funeral home. When a significant number of people have come with this commitment and planning, the meeting is edifying. We shouldn't make the teacher carry the whole weight! To come consistently with this attitude (even when hurting) is one of the key components of an effective Christian worker. Also, this is what keeps the meeting exciting for us, when we come prepared to serve.

With spouse/close friends/disciples: The tendency here is to slack off on encouragement with these people because you think, "They already know these things," etc. But exerting consistent and creative effort in this area is one of the keys to building truly satisfying close relationships!

- *Become a good listener.*

(James 1:19) This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

This is important so that we can discern what fears the person has and/or what they need to be motivated to do. Also, good listeners find that the other person is usually receptive to what he has to say because he showed him concern and respect by listening.

Many of us need to consciously practice other-centered listening because we can engage only in superficial talk or serious talk about ourselves. This area teaches us how self-centered we are. If this is our problem, we should practice seeing how long we can go only inquiring about the other person and seeking to understand him/her. Can we delight in getting to know the other person (See Watchman Nee. *Character of God's Workman*. Chapter on Listening)?

- *Use God's Word.*

(Rom. 15:4) For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

(Titus 1:9) holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

God's Word (especially its promises and indicatives) is the primary means of encouragement for Christians (Rom. 15:4; Titus 1:9). Therefore, if you want to be an effective encourager, you must become proficient in the Word!

Qualification: *This does not mean that we just quote scripture.* This can be (or be perceived as) condescending or insensitive. Instead, consider sharing what God showed you in a similar situation; "packaging" scriptural truth in different words; leading the person by questions to their own discovery of God's truth for the situation.

- *Practice, practice, practice!!!*

Like any significant skill, you have to practice if you want to improve.

Warning: Resist these three common lies...

- *"He will get a big head."* This is just our fallen nature preserving its own pride. It is God's job to keep someone humble; it is our job to encourage where he shows us.
- *"I still see some problems, so I'll wait until he gets it all right."* This is perfectionism. God sees all sorts of imperfections in us, yet he still encourages any forward movement. So should we.

- *"Since it doesn't feel natural, it is false. I'll wait until it feels natural."* You may wait forever! Awkwardness may come from many sources (NONE IN UPBRINGING; FEAR OF VULNERABILITY), but the only way anything becomes more "natural" is through practice. Furthermore, the awkward-but-sincere encouragement is greatly used by God.

Barnabus was so effective at encouraging others that he acquired the nickname, "son of encouragement." Would that be a great legacy to leave behind in our own ministry?

Admonishing one another

Definition: See chart at the beginning of the notes.

The most common Greek word for admonition, *noutheteo*, from the noun "mind" (*nous*) and the verb "put"/"place" (*tithemi*) means "to place upon the mind." This word and its Greek synonyms (*elegcho*; *epitimao*), are also translated "instruct," "convict," "correct," "reprove," "warn," "refute," "expose," and "rebuke."

Biblical admonition recognizes that Christians are sinful and liable to self-deception, and seeks to correct them by communicating God's imperatives/commands.

All Christians should be willing and able to admonish as well as encourage. In Rom. 15:14* notice that Paul is confident that all of the Christians in Rome can admonish one another—not just the leadership. He has never been in Rome to train them, yet he is confident of this! Notice also two qualities that he says enable them to admonish effectively:

(Rom. 15:14*) 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.

- **"Goodness"** – This obviously doesn't mean moral perfection, but rather *good will—loving concern for one another's well-being* (which any of us can have with the help of the Holy Spirit) vs. lack of concern, delight in another's failure, etc.
- **"Knowledge"** – This has nothing to do with having a high IQ or a professional degree, but *knowledge of God's Word which provides objective, absolute moral guidance* (which is available to all of us) vs. personal opinion, current secular wisdom, etc.

(Col. 3:16) Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

(Mat. 18:15) "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

Many other passages make this clear (Matt. 18:15ff.; Col. 3:16; 2 Thess. 3:15). Note also that Paul called on leaders to be sure to carry out this ministry (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:12), and frequently cited himself in this area as an example for others (Acts 20:31; Col. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:14).

Why Admonition Is Unpopular

Some formidable forces make it a challenge to build deep convictions about this issue. We should be aware of these forces and know the biblical response—but never use them as an excuse. In a class this size, some of you probably haven't thought your way through some of these . . .

- *Cultural Pressure:* Despite the fact that these two forms of biblical love balance and temper one another, they are often pitted against one another today. Encouragement is "in" but admonition is "out." No one likes admonition because of our sin nature, but our culture has particular problems with this. Our culture has largely rejected the legitimacy of moral absolutes and therefore equates moral correction with unloving intolerance. According to today's secular climate, humans are capable of healthy moral self-direction and are rendered dysfunctional by external moral intrusion. Admonition is therefore seen as unnecessary and even harmful.

Unfortunately, many Christians have assimilated this mentality to a remarkable degree. Encouragement is seen as mandatory to spiritual growth, but admonition is tragically absent from many Christians' view of love. It is not "politically correct" in the current climate for Christians to confront one another about moral issues. Those who admonish other Christians run the risk of being called intrusive at best, and spiritually abusive at worst. Yet the New Testament is clear that, because of human depravity, it is not possible to love one another without admonishing one another.

- *Past Experience:* Some have experienced abusive, excessive or unloving discipline from parents or church leaders. We should understand why people would react against all correction because of this. But this is clearly the BABY-BATHWATER fallacy. In rejecting all correction, we will certainly create a situation just as harmful as the original problem. As mentioned last week, we don't only have problems when we've had abusive authority figures in our past (parents, teachers, etc.) but every bit as damaging are permissive authority figures (parents, teachers, etc.). This is becoming more and more the issue we run into when admonishing in this society.

- *Temperamental Weakness*: Some (PHLEGMATICS — see temperaments in Unit two discussion on Sin Nature) are naturally prone to be diplomatic, compromising peacemakers. Our culture tends to reward this behavior, so it can go virtually unchallenged before you begin to walk with Christ. Your flesh will tend to point out people who are overly confrontative, and tell you that you are more loving than they are. If you don't let God sanctify you in this key area, your relationships will tend to be superficial and your ministry (especially discipleship) will be ineffective. Lean against your ingrained tendency to avoid confrontation: prioritize it, make yourself accountable to others to do it, etc.

Receiving Admonition

- *Value friends who care enough to reprove you!*

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to mature without receiving admonition! Solomon makes this point over and over to those who want to be wise and spiritually successful.

(Prov 9:8) - Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you. Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

(Prov 10:17) - He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who forsakes reproof goes astray.

(Prov 12:1) - Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

(Prov 13:18) - Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored.

(Prov 15:5) - A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is prudent.

(Prov 15:32,33) - He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding. The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor comes humility.

(Prov 17:10) - A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.

(Prov 24:24,25) - He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him; But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.

(Prov 27:5,6) - Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

(Prov 29:1) - A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

(Eccles. 7:5) - It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.

How did you treat the last person that reproved you? Do you think they will want to help you again with a reproof?

Have you ever thanked someone for admonishing you?

- *Be suspicious of fleshly defensiveness on your part.*

Nothing could be more common than for us to think "How dare she say this? . . . What about his sins? . . . She didn't say that very sensitively? . . . you don't know all the facts . . ."

We should be willing to receive and profit from correction that comes to us in imperfect ways through fallen people. If we are only willing to receive correction directly from God (via Word, personal conviction), we will miss out on much sanctification.

If we have responded with inappropriate defensiveness, we should go back and apologize for this. Otherwise, we are teaching people to leave us alone—and we will pay the price.

Defensiveness can take the form of self-deprecation. Some of us are visibly crushed by admonition and people sense our despair and become reluctant to correct us. Hebrews 12:5 instructs us not to be “crushed” by God's discipline, but to see it as his loving influence in our life.

- *Focus on the content of the admonition.*

Specifically, you should ask yourself two questions: "Do I recognize this action or attitude in my life?" and "Does the Bible speak of it as wrong?"

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, you should thank the person and prayerfully go to work on this issue. If you are already addressing the issue, let them know. If you haven't been, you might ask them for input on how you can work on this area. The godly Christian knows how to profit from a rebuke even when it is given in the wrong way (2 Sam. 16:5-12).

If your answer is “no,” you will need to respond accordingly. Depending on the spirit with which the person admonished you, you may want to thank him for his concern. But do not admit/apologize just to make peace. It is just as wrong to apologize for an action when you aren't wrong as it is to not apologize when you are wrong (see Paul in 1 Cor. 4:3-5). If we lie to make peace people learn not to trust us.

Receiving Admonition in our Close Relationships

In healthy close Christian relationships, there is *mutual* freedom and openness in this area. This kind of mutual accountability is to be highly valued. We will not be effective in giving admonition unless we first know how to receive it. Consider the following questions as you review your own Christian friendships:

1. *Do they know they have the "green light" to admonish you?* Or have you taught them not to do this by your reactions, or are you so uninvolved that they don't know enough about your life to be able to reprove you? If you are unsure about this, you should consider asking them if they feel this freedom. If they don't, ask them why they don't.
2. *Do they feel the freedom to raise questions about issues that are not black and white?* Or do they feel they must have an open and shut case before they can ask you? Much of the "fine-tuning" of our characters comes through other Christians who know us well—our tendencies, weaknesses, etc. EXAMPLE: "Are you just responding to this guy's interest in you—or are you prayerfully deciding what you should do about this relationship?"
3. *Do they feel the freedom to kid you about your weak areas and besetting sins?* This is a good sign that Christians are involved deeply in one another's lives and relating to each other under grace. Or do they feel like they have to walk on eggs around you because you are so defensive, thin-skinned, etc.? When Christians silently agree to relate to each other this way, it destroys true fellowship. OLD PROVERB: “He who learns to laugh at himself never runs out of things to laugh about.”

Giving Admonition

1. *It requires wisdom and discernment.*

Because of the complexity of human situations, it is impossible to prescribe a formula for when admonition is appropriate. Before admonishing someone, it is important to *prayerfully* ask ourselves questions like these:

- *Are you honestly committed to seeking his/her good* (Mt. 18:12-14)? Our heart should be breaking over their struggle in the area, knowing they are hurting their walk with God and their relationships. If they have sinned against you, have you honestly forgiven them (Mt. 18:21,22), or are you more interested in venting your own anger

because you were offended and are going to make them pay? Have you forgiven the other person for the hurt he caused you, or do you want to pay him back? Unless we can answer these questions affirmatively, we cannot trust our judgment about whether and how to admonish.

Jesus simply said, "When your brother sins, go and reprove him..." But **the context of Matthew 18:15** provides valuable guidance. Notice how this statement is placed between two parables. In the preceding context, he told the parable of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to find the one sheep who was lost. In the following context, Jesus told the parable of the steward who was forgiven his debts but refused to forgive his debtor. Evidently, the attitudes of loving concern and forgiveness help us to discern when to admonish and how to admonish effectively.

- **You may need to consider the following questions. They sometimes apply and sometimes don't. God often uses these considerations to express his wisdom on the issue.**

Does the Bible clearly describe this issue as sin? If you're not sure, find out.

Do you know for a fact that the person did what you think, or is it hearsay? If in doubt, start your discussion tentatively, asking questions.

Do you tend to be overly critical or overly soft in your dealings with others? Wisdom dictates that we should know our own temperamental tendencies and lean against them. If you tend to be overly soft on others because you are fearful of conflict, you may need to check yourself to see whether you are "chickening out" of giving a needed admonition. But if you tend to be overly critical in your dealings with others, you may need to ask yourself why you shouldn't practice forbearance.

We should be especially careful about judging motives of others when their actions are not clearly wrong (1 Cor. 4:5).

Motivation is a moral issue, but we are not equipped to detect wrong motivation as accurately as we can detect wrong behavior.

Is the person already aware of this issue and working on it? If this is the case, perhaps our best response is usually to show patience and forbearance.

How serious is the issue? Consider: Is it a pattern or only a one-time occurrence?

What is his/her role in the church?

- Also consider asking the advice of other experienced Christian workers. This is conferral between workers for another person's good—not gossip (for further discussion on confidentiality in the Body of Christ, please read the Appendix in *Loving God's Way* - p. 119, by Gary DeLashmutt).

2. *People are more receptive to admonition from one who is generally encouraging.*

Both common sense and personal experience teach us that we are more open to receive correction from those who have expressed affirmation and belief in us. Encouragement tends to help us make the distinction between what we do (which is the subject of admonition) and who we are. In this environment, admonition is more easily perceived as the loving action that it is. In a healthy family, for example, parents build an encouragement-rich environment which provides a context for their children to benefit most from their parents' admonition.

This principle, however, does not prevent us from admonishing people whom we don't know well and/or haven't been encouraging recently. This erroneous conclusion is implied by the maxim that we must “earn the right to be heard.” *Admonition is not a right that we earn; it is grace that we give and a labor of love.* We should precede admonition with encouragement when possible, but situations sometimes arise in which action must be taken even though this has not been done.

Also refute the idea that “It takes ten positive statements to make up for one critical statement.” This is easily perverted into an infantile demand: “Now you owe me ten affirming encounters . . . and you're only on #2.” This view sees admonition as a personal rejection rather than as an act of love.

Qualifications:

- *Less involved people may need to admonish if others won't.* If those who are closest to an errant Christian are unwilling to admonish him, then it falls to others to do this instead.

Sometimes the errant Christian has rejected the admonition of those closest to him, so others must confirm the seriousness of the problem. (Matthew 18:15,16)

- *Flagrant sin may require immediate correction.*

e.g. If someone is drunk and driving they must be immediately confronted because of potential harm to self or others.

Behavior clearly disruptive to a meeting must be immediately confronted.

- *People may reject loving admonition.* If someone responds poorly, we shouldn't necessarily conclude that we shouldn't have admonished someone, or that we admonished him wrongly (without enough encouragement).

Because we are sinful and can harden our hearts against correction, people can and do reject admonition even when it is given with loving motivation and in an appropriate way. Parents, for example, know that their children react, initially at least, to some discipline with the charge that it was unfair or unloving. Unless we understand this, we will tend to evaluate the legitimacy of our admonition on the person's response rather than on the basis that it was carried out in a biblical way.

3. *It should begin one-on-one and in private.*

Jesus said, "When your brother sins, go and reprove him *in private*." (Matthew 18:15) In most cases, admonition should be given in private. Though it may be more convenient or less scary for us to correct someone in the presence of others, it usually not best for the person we are correcting. This is because private admonition makes it easier for the other person to listen to our correction without being defensive. Group or public admonition should be reserved for very serious sins or for when the person has demonstrated an unwillingness to respond to earlier private admonition.

Likewise, a **face-to-face setting is preferable to a phone call or letter AND CERTAINLY NOT E-MAIL**. Of course, there are exceptions to this, but this is a general rule of thumb. We may feel more comfortable confronting someone with the protection afforded by a phone or letter, but the goal is to help the other person—not to make it easy for us. Much communication is nonverbal, and only face to face conversation allows full nonverbal communication. There may be issues that should be discussed or clarified on the spot, and this is not possible in a letter. A face-to-face meeting communicates directness and vulnerability on the part of the one who is admonishing. A letter in follow up after a conversation may help people remember issues.

Qualification: *Public offenses should normally be corrected publicly.* For example, people who share false doctrinal statements in a meeting should usually be corrected in the meeting.

4. *It should be specific and direct.*

Don't beat around the bush; get right to the point. Long introductions or encouraging statements are usually unhelpful because they can be confusing. The other person usually senses something is up and wants to know what it is. Most times, our reluctance to get to the point is based on our own fears rather than on redemptive concern for the other person. The tension is already there, and the best way to break it is to state our concern.

Vague, general, indirect admonitions are also unhelpful. "Your attitude has been lousy lately" will usually be greeted with confusion or resistance. On the other hand, "You lost your temper and spoke abusively to Mike this morning" is specific enough to immediately focus the issue.

In some cases, we may need to surface the issue with a question. "I noticed last week you didn't come home on two nights. Did you spend those nights at your girlfriend's house?" Depending on the person's answer, we will have to decide how to pursue the issue, but surfacing the issue in a direct manner has cleared the air.

5. *It should appeal to scripture.*

Biblical admonition should appeal to the Bible as the moral authority. We are not confronting the other person because he rubbed us the wrong way, or because we have decided to be his ultimate judge, but because he has violated God's moral will which is destructive to him and others. We are coming to him as a fellow Christian, equally under God's moral authority, calling him to the same accountability to God to which we ourselves submit. We should make it clear that the primary issue is not between us and the other person, but rather between him and God. We can simply state this, or we can show where the Bible speaks to the issue if necessary.

Because the Bible is God's Word, it has the power to convict people of sin in ways that are impossible for us. If we forget this, we may tend to resort to our own human cleverness or our charm or the forcefulness of our personalities. Instead, we should rely on the power of God's truth and the convicting work of his Spirit. Remember "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division between soul and spirit . . . able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

6. **Be patient rather than insisting on immediate response.**

In order to give God the opportunity to convict the other person, we should normally urge him to prayerfully reflect on what we have said if he doesn't respond properly to your admonition. Unless the matter is so serious that immediate compliance is necessary (physical violence, for example), it is usually

best to respond to his resistance by saying something like, "I'd like you to think and pray about what I've shared with you on this issue. Let's talk more about this in a couple of days."

This gives the person some time to calm down, and it affords God some time to penetrate their initial resistance with his conviction. We should pray for this. Of course, it is important to follow up such a suggestion by actually revisiting the issue soon. No doubt this is why Jesus prescribed multiple discussions in Matthew 18:15-17.

7. It should be practical and constructive when possible.

Galatians 6:2 says we should "restore with gentleness" those who have been caught in any trespass. This verse certainly underscores the importance of having a redemptive attitude toward the people we admonish, but it also urges us to go even farther. Are there practical ways we can help the person overcome this sin? Is there additional help we might be able to give? It is certainly valid to say "God says you should not be having sex with your girlfriend." But after the person has agreed that this is wrong, it may be more helpful to follow this admonition with a suggestion like "Why don't you and your girlfriend evaluate what situations make it easy for you to fall sexually, and agree together to avoid those situations?" Being constructive may require more mental effort on our part before we admonish someone, but it is part of being a restorative influence.

QUALIFICATION: There are times when we must address issues without having any constructive practical help to offer. If we have made the effort and come up empty, we often still need to be willing to speak the corrective word. In these situations, it is sufficient to say that we would like to be able to help more, and that we will be praying for God to give the person the insight he may need to overcome this issue. We may also urge him to talk to someone we know who may be able to give him this kind of help. We can direct people toward Home Group leaders and/or Xenos Counselors.

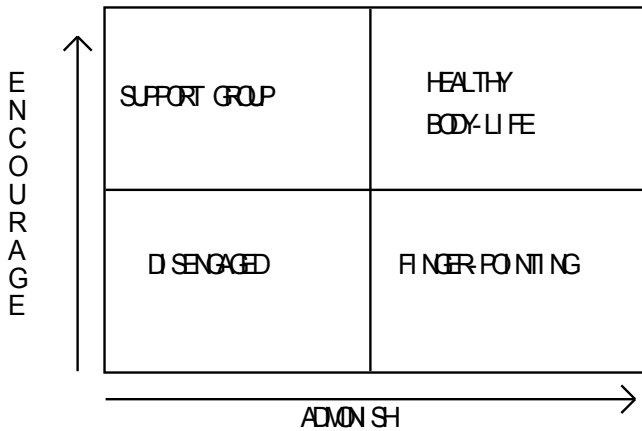
An excellent summary of a godly approach to admonition can be found in Paul's words to Timothy.

(2 Tim. 2:24) And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Assessing Relationships & Groups

Instructors: If you're running long, this section can be FYI only. The full text is included in the student notes.

Now that we've studied encouragement and admonition, consider some of your key Christian relationships in light of these two ways of "speaking the truth in love." Where would they fall in the chart below? What can *you* do to improve them (*not*: "What should they do to improve them?")?



"DISENGAGED" – Also known as "playing church." This is the antithesis of Christian Body-life and often characterizes the modern church. Our criticism of the traditional church (RITUAL OF FELLOWSHIP; TURN & GREET; FELLOWSHIP HALL) is about this. People are physically present during meetings, but that's about it. People rarely get together outside of meetings. Or if they do get together, it is usually limited to diffuse settings or superficial and safe conversations. People are courteous, even friendly—but distant. There is an atmosphere of superficiality, sometimes an unspoken conspiracy to not be deeply involved in one another's lives.

"FINGER-POINTING" - This is what characterized many of our home churches during the early 1980's. People were being admonished too frequently (sometimes for things that should have been tolerated, sometimes for things that weren't even sin). People were being held accountable for things they hadn't agreed to do. This kind of group or relationship is usually goal- and task-oriented, and highly activistic. But because there is little encouragement, a legalistic climate develops. The goals of the group or focus on sin tends to dominate so there is limited time and energy to help people in need. Anger and self-righteousness rather than genuine love become the motivation for admonition. In this climate, it's easy to be afraid to open up about your weaknesses and failures, because you're afraid you will be judged. It's easy to simply perform in the externals to earn approval and acceptance. People burn out, or run away because they can't take the pressure . . .

"SUPPORT GROUP" - This could also be called the "schmoozing" atmosphere. Our culture, working from a humanistic and deterministic base, approves of encouragement and regards it as essential for our fragile psyches. The theory seems to be "If we just affirm and encourage people, they will naturally grow." But it hates admonition and

regards it as destructive and an unloving violation of personal privacy. Of course, this is inadequate because people are also sinful and prone to self-deception. When we are not being called on to take responsibility to deal with our sins and move forward, our moral problems and low commitment go unaddressed and therefore tend to get worse. The group or relationship takes on a warm, but soft tone. It becomes more resistant to confrontation, challenge, calls to action—seeing them more and more as "unloving," "intrusive," "legalistic." People who see the need for admonition get frustrated because they aren't supported in this difficult work. They may even be viewed as the unloving one, the problem in the group.

HEALTHY BODY-LIFE - In a home group or relationship which has healthy Body-life, people are communicating both encouragement and admonition in appropriate and timely ways. The leaders have modeled this, and others have begun to imitate them. The atmosphere is warm, but also forward moving. People feel affirmed, but also challenged. The chart is somewhat deceptive here, because in a healthy group encouragement will be more frequent than admonition. This is the ideal toward which we should strive.

NOTE: We have a policy in this church that in serious situations you can "go over the head" of your leaders. Every home group has a staff consultant that can be approached for advice if there is not resolution on the home group level. We also have a Grievance Board if needed.

Memory Verses

Rom. 15:14* - All Christians have the responsibility to admonish one another. Goodness (love) and (biblical) knowledge are the two keys to effective admonition.

1 Thes. 5:14* - All Christians should practice encouragement and admonition as appropriate.

Heb. 10:24,25* - Effective encouragement requires prayerful forethought. We should come together with other Christians willing and ready to encourage them.

Assignment

Study for the exam!