

Able to Admonish

Romans 15:14-21

Halifax: 22 October 2023, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today, I am breaking from our regular sermon series to do a special message about church discipline.

- Our session had to admonish two of our members for habitually absenting themselves from public worship.
 - These two were not looking for another church, but completely stopped attending church completely.
 - We summoned each of them to meet with the session, and we are very thankful that Joseph Kubik met with us on Wednesday. We called him to repentance in the name of the Lord, and he is presently considering what he will do. Please pray for him.
 - We were saddened that Janita Henken refused to meet with us, leaving us with little choice but to suspend her from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
 - We notified her by hand delivered letter, and after we were assured that she had received the notification, we sent a letter to you, the congregation, and are announcing her suspension today.
- In announcing her suspension, we hereby call on all the members of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church to pray for her restoration.
 - In suspending her, the session officially declares, in the name of Christ, that she is not living a life that is consistent with her Christian profession.
 - When anyone is suspended from the Lord's Table, you the members are to obey the command of our Lord in 2 Thess 3:14 which says:
 - **2 Thess 3:14-15: And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.**
 - But what does it mean to admonish someone?
 - That is what we are going to look at today.
 - For this purpose, I have chosen Romans 15:14 as my preaching text.
 - I will read it to you now, beginning at Rom 15:14 and reading to v. 21.
 - It is the word of the living God, given for our admonition and instruction.

Romans 15:14-21: Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,

ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— ¹⁹ in

mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel,

not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand."

Thanks be to God for His precious Word.

I will begin by declaring to you what Paul says to Roman church in verse 14—in short that:

I. You are able to admonish each other.

A. This is a wonderful thing, but do you know what it means?

1. In the original, the word translated *admonish* is *noutheteo*.

- It is a compound word from the joining of *nous* which means *mind* with *ti-the-me* which means *to place* or *to put*.
- So it has to do with calling something to mind.

2. We often talk today about raising people's awareness about things, and that is the idea here.

- If you see a child mindlessly getting close to a hot stove, you will of course want to admonish them. You will say, "Be careful! That stove is hot!"
 - The hot stove was not in their mind, but now you have put it in their mind.
- Likewise, if you notice that the tires on your friend's car had the belts starting to show, you will say, "Hey, did you know that your tires are worn out?"
 - You put him to mind about the thing because you are his friend. You admonish him so that he will not be in danger of having an accident.
 - Now what was not in his mind is in his mind.

3. As you can see, it is a wonderful thing to be able to admonish each other.

- You are actually able to put something in someone's mind that was not there before.
- Of course you don't know whether they will accept it or do anything with the information, but at least you were able to put it into their mind.

B. Admonition is essential for us in the Christian church.

1. It is by admonition that we were brought to Christ.

a. Because we are fallen sinners, we naturally do not like to retain God in our minds—but we are admonished by the church to consider Him...

- The witness of the church calls the true God (not idols) to people's minds.
- And what a blessing for the children who are born in the church—God and His gospel are constantly brought to their minds.

b. And of course, when I speak of the true God, I speak of the Triune God who is revealed in the world by Jesus Christ who became flesh and lived among us.

- By Him, we are admonished about our sin—it is pointed out to us by His word and Spirit which the church preaches.

- It is brought to our minds by the words and the example of His people so that we are admonished by the church that we need to be reconciled to God by Jesus Christ.
- c. When we take the admonition to heart, we repent and believe the gospel.
 - Now we have what the Bible calls *a renewed mind*.
 - It is a mind that takes God into it so that we are mindful of Him, of His calling, of our duty to Him, of His majesty and goodness, of what He has done for us in Christ, of what He has promised us.
 - We are made aware of all these things, and believing, we embrace them so that our whole life is transformed.
2. As believers we have renewed minds, but we can easily get off track.
 - a. We can become separated from Christ in our minds.
 - We can forget that we are here for God, we can drift off from His commandments so that our minds are no longer fixed on Him.
 - b. There are admonitions all through the scripture such as: “Set your mind (nous) on things above, not the things of the earth.”
 - These admonitions are there because they are needed! Our minds do get off track and need to be set back in place.
 - The scriptures are actually full of admonitions—their very purpose is to bring God and His ways to mind.
 - 1 Cor 10:11 tells us this: **“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”**
3. If you think about it, the entire church is an admonishing body.
 - a. First, there are the apostles and prophets who gave us the scriptures—to admonish us.
 - Paul describes the goal of his ministry in verse 15 & 16 as that of **offering up the Gentiles to God as an acceptable sacrifice**.
 - He puts them in mind of the gospel—that they who are separated from God by their sin may be acceptable to God through faith in Christ and His saving work.
 - Look at verse 15-16:
 - Rom 15:15-16: **Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**
 - What a grand thing to bring to their minds!
 - That in Christ Jesus, they are an acceptable offering to God because Christ is an acceptable offering for their sin!
 - They can be presented to God as a people who are now poured out for Him as a pleasing offering.

- b. Then there are the ministers of the word—their job is to admonish us from the scriptures—to bring God and His ways to our minds.
 - Ministers are also (like apostles) to make people mindful of Christ through the preaching of the word—preaching is the admonition of the scriptures—that trusting in Him and serving Him and going on with Him, they may be an acceptable offering to God.
 - 2 Tim 4:2 says: **Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**
 - We preachers keep on reminding you—putting you in mind—that you are here for God—that Christ has brought you to Him and made you His.
 - c. And the elders.
 - In 1 Thes 5:12-13, it says: **And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.**
 - They are officially appointed to admonish the members—to put God in the minds of His people whether it is His promises, His commandments, His calling to us, His glory—
 - I will have more to say about official admonition (done by officers who speak for the whole church) later.
 - d. And then there are the heads of household. As head of your household, you are to admonish your families.
 - Eph 6:4 says: **And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.**
 - The goal of family worship is to bring God to your mind and theirs.
 - You are to do that all through the day, and you are especially to do that when you see any of them evidently not being mindful of God.
 - e. And indeed, all the members are to admonish each other.
 - If you ever see your brother or sister no longer mindful of Christ, it is your duty to admonish them—bring Him back to their minds.
 - Gal 6:1 says: **Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**
- So you see that the church as a whole is to be engaged in this work of admonition.
- Everyone has a part to play from the apostles to the child.
 - We are to constantly point each other to Christ.
- C. Perhaps you feel like this is too much for you—how can you admonish anyone?
1. Notice the confidence that Paul has that the believers at Rome are able to admonish one another.

- He expresses this in verse 14: **Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.**
 - He speaks of the church as a whole as those who are able to do this.
2. Notice what his confidence is based on. Two things:
- a. That they are full of *goodness*.
 - The word *goodness* speaks of someone who is upright and kind—full of a desire to help people, to benefit them.
 - This is one of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5.
 - Paul sees that about them. But there is a second thing:
 - b. He also sees that they are filled with *all knowledge*.
 - Indeed they are!
 - They know God through His Son. They know the gospel. They know God’s commandments and His call to service.
 - This knowledge makes them quite able to make each other mindful of Him.
- If you put these two qualities together, goodness and knowledge, you have someone who, being filled with God’s Spirit, seeks to admonish their brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. So now I ask you, do you have these two qualities? Are you full of goodness and full of knowledge?
- If you do, you are able to admonish others in the Lord.
 - You are mindful of Him, so you can encourage them to be mindful of Him.
 - You may not be able to explain a lot of complicated doctrine, but you know that Christ is Lord and is to be obeyed, you know that He is Saviour and is to be trusted in and relied on, you know that those who are separated from Him need to cry out to Him for mercy, you know that those who are living in sin need to repent and turn to Him for forgiveness. And you want that for them, right???
 - I am confident of you that if you are mindful of the Lord, you are competent to admonish others to be mindful of Him!
 - God’s Spirit is the one who will make your admonition effective in their lives, if he is pleased to do so.
 - You will be able to put God in their minds, at least while you admonish them!

II. So what are we to do when someone’s mind is not on God? How are we to go about this work of admonition?

- A. First of all, how can you tell if someone is not mindful of God?
- You can’t always tell—some are hypocrites who are excellent at deceiving people.

- But often there are clear indications that a person is separated from God.
1. First, if they do not obey Christ as Lord. They are separated from Him.
 - For example, if they have quit going to church.
 - They can tell you that they still feel close to God and have a great relationship with Him—but you can tell them that they are deceived.
 - How can they have a good relationship with Him when He is Lord and they are refusing to obey His call to enter His church, to submit to the elders, and to gather each Lord’s day for a holy convocation?
 - If they have a good relationship with some god who does not call his people to be part of his church and to worship him, the god they have is not the true God.
 - In 1 Cor 6, Paul warns the Corinthians to never be deceived about this.
 - 1 Cor 6:9-11: **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**
 - So don’t let anyone who is living in defiance of the Lord tell you that they have a good relationship with Him. They don’t. Admonish them!
 - Put them in mind of the true God and how they have forsaken Him.
 2. Second, you can tell that they are not mindful of God if they do not trust Him.
 - If they tell you that they do trust in Christ for salvation... perhaps they think they are right with God by their works or their good intentions...
 - Not so. Put them in mind of the Saviour.
 - Perhaps they are a believer, but you see them all anxious or fearful. Admonish them to trust and not be afraid.
 - What harm can come to them if their lives are for Him? If they live, they can live for Him, if they suffer, they can suffer for Him; if they die, they can die for Him.

TRANS> So now we are back to our initial question.

- How are we, as a church, to go about the work of admonition?
- B. The scripture gives you steps to take when you see someone who is not mindful of God.
 1. You begin with basic admonition.
 - If they are living in rebellion, or denying the truth, go to them and speak to them about it.
 - Make it a priority as we saw in 2 Thess 3:14-15: **And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.**

- Do not keep company with them means that you cannot simply hang out with them as if everything is okay because it is not okay!
 - Their restoration needs to become your primary objective.
 - Paul says something similar in 1 Cor 5:9-11: **I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.** ¹⁰ *Yet I certainly **did** not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.* ¹¹ **But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.**
 - Jesus tells you that if you go to them and they still will not hear you, go and get someone to go with you to admonish them.
 - Matthew 18:15: **Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.**
 - If they still will not repent, Jesus tells you not to let up. It is too important. See how He goes on in Matthew 18:16: **“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’** ¹⁷ **And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church.”**
 - He is not telling you to get up and announce it to everyone at church, He is telling you to tell it to the officers, the elders, who represent the whole church. He describes them as two or three who are gathered in His name. God has appointed them to rule in the church. The word *ecclesia* means ‘assembly of called out ones,’ so it can refer to the assembly of the entire congregation or the assembly of the elders.
 - Here, it refers to the elders. We know this because what Jesus describes here was already standard practice in the synagogue. It was the elders who exercised the keys of letting people in and of removing them.
2. The elders are appointed by to speak for the LORD—to speak for heaven, for Christ who reigns with the Father in heaven.
- That’s what Jesus means in Mat 18:18: **“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**
 - What began with basic admonition moves to rebuke, and now it is before the elders.
 - Depending on the nature of the case, the elders can begin with admonition or rebuke—calling the individual to repentance.
 - Theirs is an official rebuke—again, issued in the name of the Lord.
 - If the individual still refuses to repent, the elders have authority to officially declare that the individual may not come to the Lord’s Table.
 - This is what we did to Janita.

- In doing so, we officially declared that she is not living a life that is consistent with her profession and therefore that she may not come to the Lord's Table.
 - Paul also speaks of this in 1 Cor 5:7-8 using the language of the Old Testament to speak of the Lord's Supper and of Christ as our Passover.
 - **1 Cor 5:7-8: Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth."**
 - Now the person is marked out and the whole congregation is not to keep company with them but to admonish them.
 - That is where we are at with Janita.
3. Sadly, if these efforts to restore her are still not heard by her, the elders will have to remove her from the church.
- When this happens, she is no longer to be regarded as a believer.
 - Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 18:17, continuing where we left off.
 - **"But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. [This shows that the elders speak for heaven when they do this] ¹⁹ Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."**
 - In other words, Jesus is with the elders when they take this action.
 - He Himself has appointed it and authorised them to do it.
 - They are acting in His name—the person is no longer a part of His body, the church, the kingdom of God.
 - It is possible that they might be a believer, but when Jesus says to regard them as a heathen and tax collector, that means that we are to treat them as someone outside the church and needs to be evangelised.
 - We no longer admonish them as a brother or sister when this step is taken. In 1 Cor 5, Paul explains that when he says not to associate with one who is called a brother who is living apart from Christ, he is not telling us not to associate with unbelievers because then we'd have to go out of the world.
 - **1 Cor 5:9-13: I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. ¹² For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? ¹³ But**

those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

- Once a person is put out of the church, we can keep company with them. We treat them the way we treat other unbelievers.
- We no longer admonish them as a brother. They have been turned over to Satan.

C. As a church, we have been weak when it comes to admonishing people.

1. The session is largely responsible for this.

- We were seeking to give people space to work through things. Of course we ought to do that to a certain extent.
- But we realise that once it was clear that Janita or Joseph were not planning to attend church, we should have suspended them from the Supper right away—while they are working things out.
- If they were to come back, they could be restored then.
- We should not have let them remain in good standing when they were not even attending church.
- We have asked those who are considering moving their membership to stay in touch with us and to attend once a month if they want to remain as members in good standing (unless it is case where they have moved to a different city).
- We are responsible to stay up with them if we recognise them as someone who can come to the Lord’s Table.
- Pray for us as we endeavour to be more faithful as a session in the future.

2. But I also need to address some of you about your role in admonition.

- If you know that someone is living contrary to their profession, it is your responsibility to make it a priority to admonish them...
 - If they won’t hear, then take someone with you to talk to them.
 - If they still won’t hear, then bring them to the elders.
- Failure to do this leaves people in the church who are living in rebellion against Christ.
 - If a person is having doubts, it is different, so long as they are willing to continue in obedience to the Lord.
 - Still, it is a priority to do all that you can to help them... to admonish them... to set their mind back on Christ.

3. Admittedly, it is often difficult to apply these measures.

- a. We often have situations where we see people sort of pulling back, and perhaps we ask how they are doing and they say they are fine and maybe not reading the word as much as they should.
 - What do you do?
 - You pray and you encourage them and you look for opportunities to influence them, but there really is often not a lot you can do.

- One important thing to keep in mind is that we do not want to drive someone out if they are struggling.
 - Jesus does not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoking flax.
 - Very often, we have to wait patiently and leave it in God's hands, doing whatever we can.
- b. But the danger is that we use these difficult examples as an excuse to throw out the whole thing as too hard to apply.
- The question is, what do you do when you know that someone is sinning against God and not repenting? What do you do then?
 - If you don't do it when it is perfectly clear, why are you talking about the difficulty of when it is not clear?
 - You will become more skilled at helping others if you do it when it is clear—you will learn to deal better with it when it is not as clear.
- c. We need to admit the fact that we avoid admonishing those who sin because it is unpleasant, distasteful, and awkward.
- It can make people angry, and outsiders can become very critical of churches that do this.
 - We live in a day when even parental admonition is looked at as cruel because we live in a day when people's personal feelings and passions are regarded as sacred.
 - We are never to tell someone that that their personal feelings and passions are sinful and wrong, and we are never to correct anyone except for one thing...
 - If they tell someone else that they are wrong.
 - Well, maybe one or two other things... but you understand the point.
 - Most churches today need to be admonished about admonishing people and going through the steps of church discipline that I have outlined today.
 - We will not be respected by hardly anyone for doing this.
 - But we must do it because our Lord tells us to do it—and He is the Lord.
 - If people think we are unkind, we need to rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer reproach for Christ.
 - He told us it would be that way, so we must do it without dissimulation.
 - So now let's turn to our last point.

III. Why does our LORD call us to go through the process of church discipline?

- We might object that it often doesn't do any good anyway, so why bother?
- I will use the Westminster Confession to articulate the reasons we are to do it.

A. Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren.

1. This, of course, is quite obvious from what Jesus says about gaining your brother, and what Paul says about making him ashamed so that he will repent.
 2. We want them to be restored. We want them to come back to Christ and not to depart from Him to destruction.
 3. Many times, the Lord uses the admonition of a faithful believer to reclaim his brother, and sometimes the elders will be used to restore a man.
 - We have certainly seen it in our church before.
- B. For deterring of others from the like offenses.
1. If we let something, such as skipping church, go on without addressing it, it will make it easy for others fall into the same error.
 - That is one of the problems we ran into when we did not deal with some of our members more decisively for forsaking the assembly.
 - This has led to a general slackness even about attending both services, and we'd like to see improvement in that.
 - You miss important instruction if you only come to one of the two services. Also, you miss out on worshipping God.
 2. The reality is, if you have standards, you have to uphold them or the standard is nothing but empty talk.
 - We have a lot of people who are sick, but we also have a lot who are slack.
 - If we want to see God move powerfully among us, we need to be here for our stated times of worship.
 3. We have upheld standards for marital fidelity and other matters over the years—once they are known, they are addressed and discipline has been exercised.
 - God has been gracious to help us maintain those standards.
- C. For purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump.
1. This is almost the same as the previous point, but perhaps the difference has to do with the direct impact that an individual might have if their sin or heresy is not addressed.
 2. For example, if we were to allow someone to deny the Trinity without addressing them, then they might begin to teach others.
 3. Or if we do not deal with an immoral person, they might lead others in the church into their immorality.
- D. For vindicating the honor of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel.
1. This is very important!
 - When we don't deal with those who sin, it shows that we don't think that what Christ commands is very important.
 - He is not a glorious risen Lord who is to be obeyed. He is just a guy who has given us some advice that we can follow if it's not too inconvenient or disagreeable.
 2. And as far as the holy profession of the gospel,

- When we don't deal with sin in the members, we make it appear as if the kingdom of God does belong to fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners.
3. Of course those who repent of their sin can be saved. They will be fully pardoned through faith in Christ,
 - but what has become common today is to say that they will be forgiven even though they do not repent of these things.
 - Paul says to the believers who lived in these sins now, "we embrace you even though you still do these things," but rather, (I Cor 6:11): **"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."**
 - If we leave those who refuse to repent as members in good standing, we make people think Christ is okay with these things and the gospel doesn't transform people when it is truly received.
 - When we carry out discipline, we make it clear that such living betrays the profession of the gospel.
- E. And for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.
1. We learn from 1 Cor 11 that when sin is not dealt with and persons who are living in sin are not withheld from partaking of the Lord's Supper,
 - It can lead to God chastening the whole church with sickness, and even death.
 - This is frequently illustrated by example in the Old Testament.
 2. Today, we do not think in terms of corporate identity.
 - But even though we don't, God does.
 - If one person sins and it is not dealt with, His judgement can fall upon the whole church. We are a body.
 - We should all pursue the peace, purity, and prosperity of the church.
 - All three of these are compromised if we do not deal according to our Lord's holy word with those who sin.

TRANS> So you see that there are lots of good reasons for admonishing one another.

Conclusion:

If you know Christ, you are able to admonish others because you are full of goodness and knowledge.

- The primary requirement is that you are mindful of Christ. When that is so, you can bring Him to the minds of others—whether they accept Him or not.

Let me encourage all of you right now to be sure that you are mindful of Christ.

- If you are separated from Him, there is one thing that you need to do.
- Ask Him to deal with everything that separates you from Him and to come to you as your Lord and Saviour.

- He died on the cross to atone for your sins, so He will pardon you for your sins.
- He was filled with the Holy Spirit and gives the Holy Spirit to take away our sin and rebellion so that we may follow Him.
- Yes, there is no reason for you to be separated from Him.
 - It is not you but He that removes the barriers.