



BETHEL  
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## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### A Biblical Perspective on Church Relationships, Part 5

Allergies. If you suffer with one, it is not an insignificant thing. Yet, pollen or mold is not the thing that really causes allergies, according to the *AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine*,

Allergies are inappropriate or exaggerated reactions of the immune system and occur only on second or subsequent exposures to the offending agent, after the first contact has sensitized the body. (Clayman, 1989, p. 86)

In other words, allergies are the result of an over-active immune system. When a germ or a virus enters our body, our immune system *recognizes the foreign threat* and forms antibodies

which are designed to destroy these foreign invaders. And hence our body fights off the sickness in time.

With allergies, a similar process occurs. In this case the immune system comes in contact with a pollen or mold spore and *misidentifies it as a threat*. As a result, the body produces antibodies which are designed to break down the pollen the next time the “threat” is detected. It is this which makes us miserable. The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine continues,

Among the chemicals released is histamine, which causes blood vessels to widen, fluids to leak into tissues, and muscles to go into spasm. (Clayman, 1989, p. 86)

The symptoms experienced with an allergy flare-up are caused by an improper response on the part of our body to a perceived threat. And there is no question that many a church suffers from ailments similar to what we call allergies, *inappropriate responses to perceived threats!*

Now what are these perceived threats?

- Immature Christians who make us uncomfortable on account of their choices.
- Hurting Christians recoiling from a bitter providence.
- Weak Christians who raise alarm when there is none.
- Annoying Christians driven by issues which we don’t consider to be all that important.

In truth, most of these people are quite harmless, yet sadly the response of the church leaders oft-times is not! In our attempt to “protect” God, our sense of the well-being of the church, and, more often than not, our own sense of comfort, we can be found;

- Harshly rebuking the Christian who expresses doubt about God.
- Lecturing the Christian who voices a complaint about God’s providence.
- Marginalizing the child of God who isn’t like us.
- Proclaiming platitudes to the one in need of serious support.
- Avoiding the squeaky wheel.

In this case you must see, like our body’s response to allergens, the real problem is not the weak or hurting Christian BUT our inappropriate response as a church body!

How should we respond to immature or needy Christians in the body? What constitutes healthy relationships in a local gathering? A healthy relationship may be found when God’s people endeavor to counsel one another.

[God’s People Must Endeavor to Counsel One Another, v. 14a.](#)

1 Thessalonians 5:14, “and we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly.”

At the outset of Paul’s instruction in vv. 14-15, you must see that each of the exhortations he gives to the body here ultimately are the responsibility and so the calling of the office-bearers of a church. Look at the exhortation. Paul is talking about “admonishing,” “encouraging,” and “helping” the “weak,” “hurting,” and “rebellious.” That clearly is the calling of a faithful shepherd! Listen to the rebuke God gave the false shepherd of Israel at the time of Ezekiel; they are indicted because they hadn’t “admonished... encouraged... or helped” the weak and needy amongst God’s people

Ezekiel 34:4a, “Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost...”

In fact, the word rendered “admonish” is the same word Paul used to for teaching the leadership.

1 Thessalonians 5:12, “...appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.”

The word for “instruction” is the same word here!

Clearly the exhortation that Paul gave to the body of Christ constitutes a large part of THE calling and so THE tools that God gives to the Church Leader. And yet we learn pastoral care is NOT a duty which rests exclusively with the leadership of a church; it is the calling and responsibility of all in a local communion! Leon Morris wrote:

The counsel given in this verse is best understood as applying specially to the leaders. But it is not specifically addressed to them, but to the church as a whole. This means that, while the officers have a special responsibility in the matters named, the duties are not confined to them; they are the responsibility in due measure of all believers. (Morris, 2009, p. 102)

With this in mind, notice this first exhortation involves a rather significant word in the Bible when it comes to pastoral care. We are here called to “admonish the unruly.”

The word for “admonish” again is the same word used in v. 12 for “instruction”- *νουθετέω* (*noutheteō*). Recall the word speaks NOT of formal teaching as in a classroom, BUT of a one on one/two on two interaction; it is the New Testament term for “counseling.” It describes the process of bringing God’s word to bear upon the life of another person. As such, it is an active term which involves listening, observing, personal interaction, teaching, and accountability when it comes to a person’s growth in grace. Speaking of the process of *νουθετέω* (*noutheteō*), Paul wrote this:

Colossians 1:28-29, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

It couldn't be more obvious from this passage! What is *νουθετέω* (*noutheteō*)? It is bringing the word of God to bear upon the life of another unto their spiritual maturation and growth in grace! Who then are qualified to do this?

It is from this word that an entire model for counseling and pastoral care has arisen in our day, it is called Nouthetic Counseling. By definition, Nouthetic Counseling is intensified, personalized discipleship; that is the idea behind *νουθετέω* (*noutheteō*). Unlike secular models, Nouthetic Counseling; and more importantly, God's word, recognizes that God is the author of the soul and therefore knows how to fix it when it is broken.

Will there be any need for “admonishment”/counseling in the New Heavens and Earth? Absolutely Not!

Well, what is it about the New Heavens and Earth that is different from our present state that makes counseling obsolete? There is no sin! Speaking of the final state, John wrote this:

Revelation 21:4, “...and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

THE one and only problem we have as sinners in this state of sin and misery is SIN and its RAVAGING CONSEQUENCES upon the body and soul of an individual. So who is the one qualified to “admonish”/counsel another individual? Those who not only know God but also know His word!

Now this does NOT mean that there is not a skill involved in counseling that is honed through the study of God's word and the study of man. Neither does it mean that there is no place for trained professionals who have given themselves to becoming a counselor. Just as all illness always has at its root a spiritual cause. Truly, our world is broken such that there are physical ailments that can affect both the body and the brain. But what this does mean is that “admonishment”/counseling- bringing God's word to bear upon the life of another- is the calling and privilege of any and all in Christ's body who know God's word and are living in light of it!

And thus we discover in Scripture that the call to “admonish”- to engage in counseling- is the calling and responsibility of all in Christ! Speaking to the entire church body, Paul said this:

Colossians 3:16a, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you [and with that being the case], with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs...”

Do you see the calling and so qualification of those who ought to “admonish”/counsel a fallen individual? It is those who both know the Lord and are driven by His word... these are the ones Paul calls upon to “admonish”! We see the same teaching in Romans.

Romans 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.”

That is the call that Paul places upon the entire church body in our passage! We are called to “admonish” one another; specifically, “the unruly” amongst us. Who are the “unruly”? What does this word mean?

The word for “unruly” is ἄτακτος (*ataktos*) which was a military term in Paul’s day. It referred to the soldier who marched out of step or stepped out of rank. As such, it came to denote an undisciplined life or purposed rebellion, and so was used in reference to people who violated their duty or God-given calling.<sup>1</sup> Now note, there are two types of “unruly” Christians. The first is the Christian in outright rebellion. With these the call is to a bold, firm, yet gracious exhortation which says, “What you are doing/thinking is wrong. For the sake of your soul and the glory of God, this is what you must do/think!” The second are the subtle rebellious, not all rebellion is seen. God’s word says this:

1 Timothy 5:24, “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their *sins* follow after.”

At times, this “unruliness” can also be beyond the apprehension of the one in sin. So how do we know if one is “unruly”? The fruit of “unruliness” is always a broken/dysfunctional life!

Proverbs 11:14, “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

This oft-times is misquoted in the context of “Vision casting”- “*Where there is no vision, the people fall...*” Yet that is NOT what Solomon is saying here. What he is saying is that when people don’t live according to the teaching of God’s word, there will always be struggle, failure, and defeat. So “Counselors” or “Admonishers” are needed in the body of Christ! People in the body of Christ who know the Lord, are bound by His word, and help others to submit their thinking, doing, and desiring to the Lord and His word! When such a “vision” is lacking, God’s people truly do flounder- there is NO victory! We see it in 2 Chronicles when Jehoiada the priest was alive, he brought the word of God to bear upon King Joash and the kingdom flourished! Yet when the godly priest died, notice what happened:

2 Chronicles 24:17-18a, 19, “But after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and bowed down to the king, and the king listened to them. And they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim

and the idols... [So God] sent prophets to them to bring them back to the Lord [God sent counselors]; though they testified against them, they would not listen.”

What was the ultimate result? It was what God promised in Leviticus.

Leviticus 26:16, “...a sudden terror, consumption and fever that... waste[d] away the eyes and cause[d] the soul to pine away...”

Do you understand this? Struggles and emotional difficulties occur in our lives when we neglect or fall short of the calling that God has placed on us. “Where there is no guidance” the result is...

- Depression.
- Fear.
- Worry.
- Anxiety.
- Anger.
- Despair.

What then is our call when we encounter such struggles amongst God’s people? It is bringing God’s word to bear on the situation... it is to help a person realign themselves or their life with God and His Kingdom. That is the calling that this passage places on all of us in this room!!!

Oh how we need this in the church today! Men and women who love the Lord, His word, and His people so much that they are NOT willing to remain silent when others struggle. This isn’t being a busy-body, but a man or woman of God who is about the business of the body of Christ.

Now will this be easy? Absolutely not! In fact, last time we saw that this work- this good work... this ministry- is identified in Scripture as “labor” (κόπος/κοπιᾶω) which refers to a beating and the “weariness” that came from a beating (think of torture)! With confidence I can say to you that this is what will occur to you if you prove faithful to the ministry of Admonishment/Counseling. “Weariness” will come to us on account of...

- Our study of the word of God and the desire to embody the word in our life (think of Romans 7:14ff)!
- The fact that the ministry of “Admonishing” involves sinners who love their sin more than they love God. You know the expression “*a mother bear protecting her cubs*”? That is a mild description oft-times of the rebellious Christian and his commitment to his sin!
- To “admonish” in this context will require sober living and so a life driven by love for the Lord, rather than a love for momentary pleasure, personal gain, or prominence!

And yet we must see that such living is NOT optional for us! We are NOT here talking about the call of the Spiritual Green Beret! This is the calling/duty of everyone in Christ!

Secondly, God's people must encourage one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:14b, "and we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted."

The word for "encourage" is παραμυθέομαι (*paramutheomai*) which comes from two Greek words: παρά (*para*) which means "toward" and μυθέομαι (*mutheomai*) which means "to speak". The idea here is speaking kindly or in a friendly way, and so is translated as "encourage" or "console." For example, it is used in John speaking in reference to the death of Lazarus:

John 11:19, "And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother."

That is the word here! It speaks of comforting or consoling a grieving or weak heart. That is the word for "fainthearted" (ὀλιγόψυχος [*oligopsuchos*]). This word is also a compound consisting of two Greek words: ὀλίγος (*oligos*) which means "few," "little," or "small" and ψυχή (*psuchē*) which is the word used in Scripture for the "soul" or the "breath" of an individual. Combined, the word means "small-breathed" which is a vivid way of referring to someone who is despondent, discouraged, or faint-hearted!<sup>2</sup> Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

Whereas the unruly were pushing on the edges of acceptable Christian behavior, these were the worried sheep, huddled in the middle and afraid to get near the edge. (Dr. John MacArthur, 2002, p. 178)

"Fainthearted" refers to any and all who are not naturally bold, who lack the strength to face up to persecution, or who are temporarily overwhelmed by the stresses of life (cf. Exodus 6:9; Numbers 21:4; Isaiah 25:5; 35:4; 54:6; 57:15). And thus the call to "encourage the fainthearted" is the work of softening or lightening the weight upon the soul caused by physical ailment, emotional difficulty, or spiritual depression. In this regard, there is no set approach for this ministry in Scripture. Accordingly, it would include but not be limited to:

- The Ministry of Presence where just listening to another person as they relate their struggle can encourage or cheer them up.
- Taking the word of God and showing the "small-breathed" individual that God hasn't changed, nor has His love (Romans 8:38–39)!
- Coming alongside a struggling saint and assuring them that...
  - The Lord answers prayer (1 John 5:14–15).

- Their salvation is secure in Christ (John 10:27–29).
- In and through all things God is fulfilling His purpose and will for them in Christ (Proverbs 19:21; Romans 8:28–29).

John Bunyan showed us what this exhortation would look like in real time in his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan described the journey of Christian and Hopeful on their trek to the Celestial City (heaven). In the book, you will note that one element that is quickly brought out is the fellowship enjoyed between Christian and Hopeful. They held each other accountable. They discussed, debated, and even rebuked each other at times. It is quite beautiful!

Toward the end of the book, Bunyan depicted the death of Christian as the crossing of a great river. As they approach the river, Christian is taken back and asks if their might not be an easier way to enter glory. But the angels tell him that only two men (Enoch and Elijah) had ever crossed another way; yet they were the exception. And so Christian and Hopeful enter in the river/death together, but NOT before receiving the promise, “You shall find [the river] deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the Place.”

Now as Christian struggled on his death bed, Bunyan detailed the following conversation between him and Hopeful- it is a beautiful picture of Paul's exhortation here of “lightening the burden of a fainthearted” believer (there is no question that Bunyan as a pastor ministered at the bedside of many a dying saint). Bunyan wrote:

Entering [into death], Christian began to sink, and crying out to his good friend Hopeful, he said, ‘I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all the waves go over me’... Then Hopeful said, ‘Be of good cheer, my brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good.’ Christian responded, ‘Ah! My friend, the sorrows of death have surrounded me, I shall not see the Land that flows with milk and honey.’ And with these words, a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian so that he could not see before him... [So] Hopeful also would endeavor to comfort him, saying, ‘Brother, I see the Gate, and men standing by to receive us!’ But Christian would answer, ‘It's you, it's you they wait for; you have been hopeful ever since I knew you.’ ‘And so have you,’ replied Hopeful. Christian responded, ‘Ah, Brother! surely if I was right, He would now rise to help me, but for my sins He has brought me into the snare, and has left me.’ Hopeful replied, ‘My Brother, you have quite forgot the text where it is said of the wicked, “There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm, they are not troubled as other men, neither are they plagued like other men.” These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God has forsaken you, but are sent to try you, to discover whether you will call to mind all that you have received of His goodness, and depend upon Him in your distress.’ ¶ Then I saw in my dream that Christian was as in a muse a while. To whom also Hopeful added these words, ‘Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ makes you whole.’ And with that Christian broke out with a loud voice, ‘Oh, I see him again!...’” (Bunyan, 2003, pp. 181-182)



What a beautiful picture of what Christian-encouragement is all about. Do you see it? Unlike ministry to the rebellious, Christian-encouragement involves “fainthearted” Christians who are weak or frightened such that they shrink back in their faith!

The church is full of Christians like this and it is our privilege and calling (1) through the promises of God given to us in His word and/or (2) through acts of mercy, grace, and care to

- Lighten their burden!
- Speak the word of hope!
- Be there to grieve and weep with another! Truly, a grief that is shared is a grief that is halved!
- *And so to encourage them to trust in Christ!*

Yet to do this we must live other-centered lives where we endeavor to serve (1) at the bidding of Christ, (2) to the glory of Christ, (3) in submission to Christ and His word. This will mean that we

- Genuinely pray for God to take us and mold us into the men or women He wants us to be.
- Daily read and study the word of God NOT ONLY to know the Lord, BUT ALSO to be equipped to minister to another in need.
- Acquire whatever training, encouragement, or guidance that is necessary for us to be a blessing in the Jerusalem where God has placed us!

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> That which was behind this exhortation no doubt were the idle who had stopped working and so were looking to the rest of the church body to support them (cf. 1 Thes. 4:11-12; 2 Thes. 3:6-7, 11).

<sup>2</sup> That which was behind this exhortation no doubt were the struggling who recently had lost a loved one (cf. 1 Thes. 4:13-18).