

Presenting Every Man Perfect, Part 2

Admonishing Every Man

Colossians 1:28–29

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Introduction

I want to begin this morning, a bit unconventionally, with a fill-in-the-blank test. I'm going to quote a passage of Scripture—I'm not going to tell you which one, but it's a single verse in the New Testament—and I'm going to leave one word out, and I want you to think about what word you think fills in the blank. Here it is: "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 _____ one another." What word do you think fills in that blank?

I think a lot of us might guess, "love." "I'm convinced that you're full of goodness and knowledge and able to *love* one another. Others might say, "encourage," or "affirm." "I'm convinced you're able to *serve* one another," or "*teach* one another." Well, the text is Romans chapter 15 verse 14, and it reads like this: "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." It's not quite what we would expect, but the word that correctly fills that blank is "admonish."

Now, the word "admonish" is translated from the Greek word *noutheteō*, which comes from two Greek words: *nous*, which means "mind," and *tithēmi*, which means "to put" or "to place." So *noutheteō* literally means to put someone in mind of something. One commentator defined it as "setting the mind of someone in proper order" (O'Brien, 88). It means to bring correction, to rebuke, even to warn someone of the consequences of foolish conduct or wrong thinking. In fact, you've heard folks at Grace Church and The Master's University and Seminary put a high premium on what we call "Biblical Counseling"—the idea that Scripture is sufficient for the matters discussed in all sorts of counseling situations. Well, before it was called "Biblical Counseling" it was widely known as *nouthetic* counseling, based on this word *noutheteō*, for correction, rebuke, warning, and admonition.

And the Apostle Paul regards this ability to wisely and benevolently admonish one another as a virtue worthy to be praised in a congregation. In fact, from what Scripture says about admonition, correction, and rebuke, I'd say that if a church lacks this competency to biblically admonish one another, we do little more than play church. We fool ourselves into thinking we're experiencing genuine fellowship when really we're just little more than a social club.

Well, as we pick back up on our little mini-series on Colossians 1:28 and 29—a text that so succinctly captures Paul's philosophy of ministry and understanding of Christian *discipleship*—

we find that this ministry of admonition plays a central role. If you were here last week, you heard me mention that we were going to take a brief hiatus from our exposition of the Book of 2 Corinthians in order to focus on the theme of discipleship in the Christian life. I'm headed to New Zealand at the end of this month, where I'll be doing a conference on discipleship. And as I've been preparing for that, I wanted to preach these messages to GraceLife as well.

And so we began that last week by taking a big-picture look at the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, a man who embodied a wholehearted commitment to the Lord's Great Commission to *make disciples* of all nations. And after reviewing several of those catalogs of his sufferings—afflictions, persecutions, hardships, burdens, labors, beatings, imprisonments, and more—we asked: What drove Paul? What animated him in ministry? What was he trying to accomplish that was worth all the suffering he endured as he took the Gospel across the known world? And we turned to Colossians chapter 1, and we found that the answer to that question is: discipleship. Colossians chapter 1, verses 28 and 29. There Paul writes, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

This is one of those pregnant passages, packed with significance, that concisely summarizes Paul's philosophy of ministry. This is what his ministry is *about* for him. This is what drove him and animated him for joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of the most burdensome afflictions. He wants to see every Christian made complete in Christ—to be brought to perfect maturity and complete conformity to the image of Jesus.

And that ought to be of great interest to each and every one of us, because each and every one of us—if we are in Christ, if we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—has been called to ministry. And we were reminded of that last week as well. 2 Corinthians 3:6: Every *partaker* of the New Covenant is a *minister* of the New Covenant. 2 Corinthians 5:18: Everyone saved by faith in the *message* of reconciliation has been entrusted with the *ministry* of reconciliation. We are to serve the lost by preaching the Gospel, and we are to serve the Church by edifying one another and building one another up as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. You have all been called to ministry.

And therefore, your philosophy of ministry—your understanding of what ministry is and how it is to be accomplished—must be the same as Paul's philosophy of ministry. And inasmuch as Colossians 1:28–29 succinctly encapsulates Paul's philosophy of ministry as centering on discipleship, it is a fitting text to turn to as we consider Scripture's teaching on what discipleship is. And I mentioned last week that in these two verses, we find **five elements of Christian discipleship**—five elements of Christian discipleship that will equip us to faithfully engage in the work of the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations. And we got through one and a half of those last week. Let's recap.

Review I: The Scheme of Discipleship (v. 28c–29a)

The **first element** of discipleship that we found in this text was, number one, **the scheme of discipleship**, or the *goal* of discipleship, or the *purpose* of discipleship, or the *aim* of

discipleship. And we see this in the last part of verse 28 into the first part of verse 29. Paul says, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that* we may present every man complete in Christ. *For this purpose* also I labor”

This was the driving purpose in all of Paul’s ministerial efforts. The passion of his life was to labor alongside each and every believer in Jesus so that every Christian will progress in sanctification and finally be brought to perfection in glorification. Romans 8:29 defines sanctification as becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ—progressively becoming more and more like Jesus. You see Paul’s heart laid wide open in Galatians 4:19, where he tells those believers, “I am in *the anguish of childbirth* until Christ is formed in you.” He is absolutely consumed by this! He wasn’t content to get “decisions for Christ” and move on to his next evangelistic campaign! He wasn’t satisfied with making mere *converts*! The passion of his life was to see those who had been brought to faith in Christ *strengthened* in their faith in Christ! To see them brought to maturity! To see them grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 3:18. Paul was not content to leave people where they were, just so long as he knew they were saved. He wasn’t content with entry-level Christianity. “Oh, you believed. You’re in. I’m on to the next project.” No, he was consumed with presenting to Christ the pure Bride He is worthy of.

And we learned from this that the purity of the Bride of Christ ought to be our great passion as well—that we ought to know something of the anguish of childbirth because we long to see Christ fully formed in our brothers and sisters—something of that daily pressure of intense concern that feels the pain of spiritual weakness in the body of Christ as our own weakness—that isn’t content with shallow notions of Christ and sound doctrine, but longs to see God’s people attain to all the wealth of the treasures and of wisdom and knowledge that are bound up in the knowledge of Christ (Col 2:2–3). We learned that we must devote ourselves to discipleship—to investing in the body of Christ, to coming alongside one another and helping each other “come after” and “follow” Jesus better, helping each other become more faithful followers of Jesus, committed to obeying all that Christ has commanded us.

Review II: The Substance of Discipleship (v. 28a)

And then, having seen that the scheme of discipleship is the sanctification and maturity of the church—to present every man perfect in Christ—we asked how we are to accomplish that. What did Paul do to ensure that every Christian would be constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, becoming increasingly conformed to Christlikeness? And that brought us to the **second element of Christian discipleship** that we find in this text, namely, the **substance** of discipleship. And we see it in verse 28: “*We proclaim Him*, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” In the midst of the seemingly infinite number of tasks and responsibilities in church ministry, Paul boils down the essence of his ministry to this one thing. And it is, “We proclaim Him!” We preach Christ!

Most fundamentally, this is what discipleship is. People do a lot of things to complicate discipleship, but the *sine qua non*, the irreducible minimum, the very sum and **substance** of Christian discipleship is the proclamation of Christ to one another. *That* will accomplish the goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ (Col 1:28). *That* will cause the body of Christ to be

conformed into His image (Rom 8:29). The simple proclamation of Jesus to His people will disclose His glory to them, and as they behold with the eyes of faith the glory of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says they will be increasingly *transformed* into the image of that glory that they behold. The loveliness and beauty of His glory satisfies the heart, so that they don't seek satisfaction in sin, but in obedience to all that Christ has commanded. Whether in preaching, or in counseling, or at Bible study, or just in our everyday conversations, the heart and soul of all discipleship is the proclamation of Christ to one another.

And last week we spent some time just celebrating the person and work of Christ together, meditating on the fact that Jesus is God, that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, that He is therefore Lord of all; that He is glorious, and that He laid aside His glory when He took on human nature in the mystery of the incarnation; that He is the one Mediator between God and man, whose life of perfect obedience is credited to us by faith, and whose substitutionary death paid the full penalty of all our sins, as He bore the wrath of God in our place; that He rose again on the third day in victory over sin and death, ascended to the right hand of the Father and now intercedes for His own; and that He is returning soon to defeat His enemies and to rule the world in righteousness. *That* is the Christ we preach. It's as we proclaim *Him* to one another, that the body of Christ is built up and edified and transformed into Christ's image.

Introduction to Admonition

But you'll notice that the sentence doesn't end with "We proclaim Him." Paul expounds further on what it means to proclaim Christ—what proclaiming Christ to every man entails. And what you see in verse 28 is that the proclamation of Christ is broken down into two main functions. And one of those functions happens to be the answer to our little fill-in-the-blank at the beginning of the sermon. Look at the text: "We proclaim Him, *admonishing* every man and *teaching* every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." The **substance** of discipleship—the proclamation of Christ—is carried out through the ministry of *teaching* and the ministry of *admonition*. And it is the ministry of admonition that we'll focus on this morning.

Now, we've already been introduced to the premium Paul has placed on a church's ability to wisely and benevolently admonish one another—to correct one another, to rebuke one another when we're in sin, to warn each other of the consequences of errant doctrine or sinful conduct. Why? Because if we are to have any hope of presenting every man complete in Christ—if we are to have any hope of seeing our brothers and sisters make progress in sanctification and Christian maturity—we have to know how to deal with sin in the body.

I remember reading a news report about a teenage girl who was admitted to the hospital with an unknown ailment. She was very physically active—even preparing to earn her living in nautical sports. Well, during her stay at the hospital, the doctors had discovered that she had cancer in her arm. And by then it was so advanced that the only way to make sure it didn't spread was to amputate her arm. Now that was absolutely devastating to her, and, as you can imagine, she resisted it. She was hoping for chemotherapy or surgery or radiation—anything less drastic than amputation! But the disease was too advanced, and drastic measures were unavoidable. To allow

the cancer to linger any further would have led to its spreading throughout her body, which would eventually take her life.

Friends, sin in the body of Christ works the same way. Sin is spiritual cancer, which, if left unchecked, will infect the whole body until it destroys all spiritual life. And so if there is a member of the body of Christ that is infected with the cancer of unrepentant sin, the other members of the body need to come alongside that person and help them root out that sin their life. And if there's no repentance, what do we do? We amputate. We exercise church discipline. In 1 Corinthians 5:6 Paul said, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump."

And so the ministry of admonition is absolutely essential if there is to be health and growth in the body of Christ. And because Paul's great passion was to present every Christian perfect in Christ, he himself engaged in this ministry of admonition throughout his own life. Turn to Acts chapter 20. Paul is giving his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, among whom he labored for three years, and whom he loved very dearly. And in that address he says, Acts chapter 20 verse 18, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;" verse 20: "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house." And then skip down to verses 26 and 27: "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." And then again in verse 31, he says, "Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to *admonish* each one with tears."

Paul says, "If there was one thing that has characterized my ministry among you, it's that I didn't hold anything back. I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, even if it was difficult for you to receive. Indeed, I admonished each one of you daily for three years!" When the situation called for Paul to talk straight, even in what might have been a severe manner, he didn't let his fear of man hinder him from actually benefiting his brethren by admonishing them. In fact, it was true love that drove him to do so.

And we see evidence of that. You might have thought that if this was his M.O. he wouldn't be very liked among this group. I mean, giving correction and admonition night and day for *three years*? You'd think the Ephesians would have gotten tired of Paul pretty quickly! But the very opposite was true. The result of Paul's tireless ministry of rebuke and admonition among them was genuine, loving fellowship. Look at verses 36 to 38 "When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again." That is heartwarming affection! For someone who admonished them every day for three years! You see, these brothers knew that Paul was benefiting them by proclaiming Christ to them, even and especially in his admonitions, rebukes, confrontations, and warnings. And his love, manifested in his ministry of night-and-day admonition, produced in them great and overwhelming love for him.

And if the Lord has been kind to you, you know what that kind of affection is like. I know I do. In my own Christian life, my most treasured friends and brothers are those who have been faithful to bring me correction—who regularly offer loving, biblical admonition when I need it. And when ministry has taken some of those men across the country or across the world, the affections that have welled up in my soul were not unlike the Ephesian elders' affections for Paul. I love these men, because by their faithful, loving correction, they have exposed sin in my life and set me on a course to love and serve my Savior more faithfully.

We need to lay hold of this kind of blessing. We cannot afford to forfeit the blessings that result from a ministry of faithful admonition in the local church. And therefore we need to recalibrate our thinking concerning the giving and receiving of correction from faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather than bristling at it, being offended by it, and dismissing it as the overbearing judgmentalism of busybodies, we ought to humbly receive and even invite correction from our brethren. And rather than fearing the offense that'll be taken by the correction we might *give*, we ought not to shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable to our fellow believers. To put it in the language of Colossians 1:28: if we're serious about presenting every man complete in Christ, and if we're serious about proclaiming Christ, we must be faithful to admonish every man with all wisdom. A key feature of genuine Christian discipleship is the ministry of admonition. And so to equip us for that, we're going to examine **four aspects** of this biblical ministry of admonition.

A. Giving Admonition

And that **first aspect** is every Christian's responsibility to **give admonition**—to, full of goodness and knowledge, to admonish one another. Now, when it comes to lovingly coming alongside our brothers and sisters and making them aware of some sin that we've perceived in them, we can tend to be timid and hesitant. Some of us just don't want to be perceived as arrogant, like we've got everything together when there's a plank in our own eye. Some of us are just afraid. We may have good intentions, but we're afraid that our brother or sister will take our correction the wrong way and won't receive us as loving. So we rationalize not saying anything and we call it love "covering" a multitude of sins. Others of us are afraid they'll be hostile and that the confrontation of sin might result in damage to the friendship.

But the Scriptures tell us that we must be faithful in our ministry to our brothers and sisters by giving admonition. Turn back to the Book of Proverbs, to chapter 27. In Proverbs 27 verse 6, Solomon says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." Friends, all of the Proverbs are worth committing to memory, but this one has to stand somewhere near the top of the list. GraceLife, *friends* afflict with faithful wounds! Enemies deceive with flattery and kisses. You may think that if you minimize or downplay the sins of your brothers and sisters that you're being magnanimous or merciful. You may think it's more loving to flatter and compliment your friends and tell them how great they're doing spiritually. And, of course, it's fine to give people encouragement! But if there's something actually wrong—if there's sin that's actually taken root in this person's life—you are an *enemy* to your brother if you fail to wound him faithfully. Proverbs 29:5 says, "A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps." If you gloss over sin and you puff up your brother to make him think he's more godly than he is, you might as well be setting a trap that will ensnare him.

And turn over to Proverbs 28:23. There Solomon says, “He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.” For all of our concern about what other people are going to think of us if we bring them correction, Scripture promises that when all is said and done you will find *more* favor than if you only sweep things under the rug and give your brother a false assurance in his sin.

And if you would, turn with me to 2 Timothy 3. It’s in that familiar verse, 2 Timothy 3:16, that we learn that the Lord has given us the Scriptures for this very purpose of **giving faithful admonition** to our fellow members of the body of Christ. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” And then, look down to chapter 4 verse 2, where he charges Timothy, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” The Spirit inspired Scripture to be profitable for reproof and correction, and Timothy is to preach the Word with an eye to reproving, rebuking, and exhorting. If the wounds of a friend are faithful, Scripture is the sword of the Spirit that the faithful saints wield as they aim to sharpen their brothers and sisters and present them complete in Christ.

And as we’ve seen, Paul was no stranger to this ministry of **giving admonition** in his own life. He considered it profitable for the sake of his brothers and for the sake of the Gospel. We get a striking illustration of that in Galatians 2, verses 11 to 14. He says, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him *to his face*, because he stood condemned.” Peter was acting inconsistently with the Gospel. He had laid aside his observance of the Mosaic dietary laws because he understood what the Lord had showed him in his vision in Acts 10. In Christ, the Law is fulfilled, all foods are clean, and there is no longer to be a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. But then when the Jews showed up, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles and started to act all Jewish again. And Paul says that’s out of step with the Gospel we’ve received! In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek! And so in verse 14 Paul writes, “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

Paul didn’t say, “Oh man, this is Peter! The great preacher and leader of the early church! The miracle-worker! The bold leader who withstood the threats of the Sanhedrin! What could I ever say that he’d listen to?” No, he saw him as a brother in need of correction, and he let his fear of God trump his fear of man. And it wasn’t like he was going after an enemy, either! Peter was his dear friend and brother in the Lord! This is someone he had deep affection for, whom he loved dearly. And yet he feels no hesitation about rebuking him sharply and in public! Again, this is not Paul being overly sensitive to sin and overly harsh with his fellow believers. This is love, stretching to very uncomfortable and unpleasant actions to serve the one in error. If anything, this interaction should teach us that as Christians, we have a responsibility—even a stewardship—to confront and correct our brother when we see him sinning. Because by that sin he cuts himself off from the blessings of God that flow from obedience, and love yearns for the beloved to enjoy such blessings and benefits.

One more example of this. We're familiar with the context of 2 Corinthians, where, in between First and Second Corinthians, Paul has written a severe letter to the church at Corinth sternly rebuking them for failing to deal with sin in the church properly. And in 2 Corinthians 2:4, he tells them why he had admonished them so severely. He says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." Paul's letter wasn't just venting his frustrations on the Corinthians to make himself feel better. It wasn't because he was too much of a coward to be so forthright with them in person. It wasn't because he was trying to be a domineering tyrant, seeking to intimidate the Corinthians into siding with him. It was so that his love for them would be made manifest. And his love for them would be made manifest when they considered what extraordinarily unpleasant lengths he was willing to go to in order to protect them from the damning effects of sin and false teaching.

He's basically saying, "Dear Corinthians, don't think it was easy for me to write that letter to you! Don't think I took some perverse delight in confronting you like that! I had no desire to make you sorrowful! I don't love conflict! Frankly, it would have been much easier for me to avoid the situation entirely! But, dear brothers and sisters, I love you all too much to abandon you to damning doctrines of the false apostles for the sake of avoiding difficult conversations! I love you all too much to *not* confront you about your sin."

You see, discernment properly identifies sin for the cancer that it is. And love constrains us to have the difficult conversations with our brothers and sisters, in which we lovingly explain that, though they might not be aware of it, they've got spiritual cancer, and they need to do something about it before it ravages their soul. Sure, it's easier to ignore sin in one another. It's easier to not have people call you judgmental, and arrogant, and holier-than-thou because you've brought sin to their attention. It's easier to avoid resolving that conflict with your brother; in a big church like this, you can just pretend they don't even exist! It's easier to write people off and terminate relationships. But dear friends: that is not ministry. That is not love. The loving servant of Christ's flock—the one committed to presenting every man perfect in Christ—is willing to endure all manner of difficulty for the sake of one another's mortification of sin and joy in Jesus! The wounds of a friend are faithful because those wounds work in the soul a godly sorrow that produces a repentance, leading to salvation (cf. 2 Cor 7:9–10).

And so we must be committed to—lovingly, with all goodness, and according to knowledge—to engaging in the ministry of **giving admonition**.

B. Receiving Admonition

Secondly, we are also commanded to **receive admonition** well. Not only are we to give admonition, we are to **receive admonition**. As I mentioned earlier, one of the reasons it is so difficult to be faithful in giving needed admonition is that those on the receiving end receive it so poorly. This should not be us. We should not put stumbling blocks in the way of our own correction. We want to be corrected when we are wrong, and so we must be intentional about rooting out any bad attitudes that would cause one of our brothers or sisters to hesitate to come to us in love and open our eyes to our sin.

Let's turn back to the Book of Proverbs and consider what the Scriptures say about those who **receive admonition** well, versus those who receive it poorly. Let's start with Proverbs chapter 9 verse 8. The text says, "Reprove a wise man and he will" argue with you for an hour about how your correction isn't technically biblically accurate. No, that's not what it says. "Reprove a wise man and," even though the substance of your correction was justified, he'll pick apart *how* you said it. That's not it either. Proverbs 9:8: "Reprove a *wise* man and he will *love* you." Is that your reaction when you're admonished by faithful brothers and sisters? If not, are you a *wise* man or woman?

Turn over to Proverbs 10 verse 17. The text reads, "He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray." Proverbs chapter 12 verse 1. This has always been one of my favorite Proverbs, because of how squarely it smacks me between the eyes. I'm dull enough that I need God to be blunt with me! Proverbs 12:1: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." Next, turn to Proverbs 13:10. "Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel." What's insolence? It's the attitude that says, "*I* didn't do anything wrong!" "That can't be *my* fault?" "You think *I'm* sinning? You've got no discernment!" It's the attitude that I'm always right, and if there's a problem it's always the other guy's fault. And what does that get you? Nothing but strife, contention, quarrels. But those who are wise receive counsel.

Flip over to Proverbs 15, verses 31 and 32. Solomon says, "He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding." And just one more, because I think you're getting the picture. Proverbs 17:10: "A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool."

So let's summarize what we've learned from those six Proverbs of divine wisdom. If you (a) love discipline, (b) listen to reproof, and (c) receive counsel and rebuke, you are (i) wise, (ii) you love knowledge, (iii) you're on the path of life, (iv) you have wisdom, and (v) you'll acquire understanding. On the other hand: If you refuse to receive rebuke, you will (i) go astray, (ii) you'll know nothing but strife, (iii) you effectively despise your own self, and (iv) you are a stupid fool. Strong language from Solomon! And yet, there it is: clear, inescapable, and gracious revelation from God for our benefit.

GraceLife, which one of those people do you want to be? The stupid fool who hates himself? Or the wise lover of knowledge on the path of life? It's an easy choice, now, when we're thinking rightly, our minds properly informed by the Word of God. But those are the questions you need to ask yourself the next time a brother or sister comes to you with correction. A brother comes to you and says, "Hey, thanks for meeting with me. I've been praying about this, and I believe the Lord would have me bring something to your attention that I've observed." And right there, you feel that twinge in your heart. You sort of silently gasp and recognize, "He's confronting me about something!" And in that very moment you need to rise up and battle the temptation to be proud, to be foolish, to be insolent, to reject counsel. You need to ask yourself, "Do I want to be the stupid fool or the wise lover of knowledge?" And you need to put the defenses down, and humbly listen to the admonition your brother is bringing you.

Now, that doesn't mean that you always have to agree! We are not to be slaves to the sensibilities of every legalist with a weak conscience. It may be that this person has seen some sin in you that genuinely isn't there. Maybe it's a misunderstanding. And in that case you'd need to hear them out, acknowledge that you're not above sinning in the way that they've suggested, but for the sake of integrity before the Lord you explain the misunderstanding. Or, you may not agree right away, but you commit to take that before the Lord and examine yourself. You say, "Brother, thank you for your loving concern for me and my walk with the Lord. I'll be honest and say it's not something that I discern in myself right away, but I'm going to take some time to consider this before the Lord. Pray for me." But friends, as sinful as we are, I'd say that, even if our brother isn't 100% right about what he's brought to our attention, more often than not, there's something in that correction that we can receive. There's some benefit to be wrung out of that rebuke, and the wise man or woman hunts down that benefit. We need to **receive admonition** well.

C. Inviting Admonition

And in fact, Scripture goes further than requiring us to receive admonition well. More than that, Scripture portrays godly men going out of their way to **invite admonition** and correction lest they go astray. And that brings us to our **third point**. We are to give admonition, receive admonition, and, **number three**, we are even to **invite admonition**.

Turn to Psalm 141. David is calling upon the Lord for help as he's being pursued by his enemies. And he's praying for integrity in his own life so that he doesn't forfeit the Lord's blessing. And in verse 5, he says something that is so instructive for us. Psalm 141 verse 5: David says, "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon the head; do not let my head refuse it." Now, the word "smite" is not a dainty word! The same word appears in Psalm 74:6 where it's translated "to smash with a hammer." And yet David is **inviting** this! He says being struck with this heavy blow from the righteous is a *kindness* done to him! It's *oil* upon his head! Spurgeon comments on that imagery of anointing oil. He says, "As oil refreshes and perfumes, so does reproof when fitly taken sweeten and renew the heart." You see, the wise man or woman loves the admonition of the righteous. It refreshes and perfumes. It sweetens and renews. The wise man or woman **invites** the **admonition** of other wise men and women.

And so that ought to be part of our discipleship relationships with one another in the church. Each and every one of you should be able to name five people—five non-family members in the church—who know you well enough to be regularly speaking into your life, helping you expose and mortify sin in your life, and sharpening you against the dangerous allure of false doctrine. If you don't have that, you need to go to brothers and sisters you can trust, and you need to **invite** their **admonition** into your life. "Brother, I really value your friendship and respect your grasp of the Scriptures. I just want to invite you, if you see anything in my life that is not honoring to the Lord, to bring that to my attention. I'll do my best to receive it humbly."

Could you imagine all the sin that would get mortified if we were faithful to **invite admonition** into our lives from our brothers and sisters in the church? Our sin wouldn't be able to hide! One of the greatest advantages that our flesh has is that we're so often blind to our own errors. In Psalm 19:12, David says, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults." In Psalm

139:23–24, David prays, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me.” We need God to reveal sin in us, because we don’t always see it in ourselves. It’s like our flesh has a self-preserving mechanism in causing us to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. And so it’s only the wise man or woman who **invites** the correction and rebuke of their fellow believers, who may be able to see a hidden fault or a hurtful way in us better than we can see it in ourselves. We need to have those kinds of genuine relationships, GraceLife! And so we ought to seek out and **invite** the admonition of the righteous.

D. The Goal of Admonition

Well, we’ve seen our responsibility to give admonition, to receive admonition, and even to pursue and invite admonition from brothers and sisters we trust to “smite us in kindness.” We come now to our **fourth** point, namely, **the goal of admonition**. What’s the purpose, the end goal, the result, the motivation to admonish one other? For that, I want us to turn to Hebrews chapter 12.

The author of Hebrews is writing to this band of persecuted, Jewish Christians to encourage them to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of the conflicts they’re experiencing, which the author ultimately attributes to God’s chastening of them. And in Hebrews 12, the author quotes the Book of Proverbs to show them that the Lord’s discipline is a mark of His grace to them, because He disciplines those whom He loves. Starting in verse 5, he says, “You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproofed by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” You see the argument? “Don’t faint under the Lord’s discipline! Sons and daughters get discipline! It’s a blessing! It’s a mark of your adoption!”

And then the author tells us the purpose for God’s discipline. He explains how it is loving. Verses 9 and 10: “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.” That is a staggeringly glorious truth to hear! God disciplines His children for our benefit, for our good. And what is our good? It is that we might share in God’s holiness! The discipline that comes from God—which admittedly, he says in verse 11, is not always pleasant at the time—that discipline comes to refine us, to purify us, so that we might become increasingly holy—increasingly like Him—conformed more to the image of Christ! To be presented perfect in Him! The greatest benefit we could ever receive is to share in the holiness of God Himself! And so the Lord disciplines us—oftentimes by means of the **admonition** of other believers—to make us increasingly holy like Himself.

But it’s important to recognize that holiness is not an end in itself. We don’t want to be holy just for the sake of being holy. Holiness for the sake of holiness is nothing more than moralistic Pharisaism. No, the writer of Hebrews tells us why we should be concerned about sharing

in God's holiness when he says in chapter 12 verse 14: "Pursue...the sanctification without which no one will *see the Lord*." Let that land on you! We are commanded to pursue sanctification—to pursue holiness—precisely because if we don't have it, we will not see God! *That* is what all this striving after holiness, all this pursuing conformity to Christlikeness, all this presenting every man complete, is about. It's about beholding the most beautiful and satisfying thing there is to see: the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ! Discipline, rebuke, reproof, correction, admonition—when they are founded upon the Word of God—they are means of the sanctification that will fit us to see Christ face to face in the glories of heaven.

And so if it's *seeing Christ* that's at stake here, Paul is most certainly going to celebrate the Romans' competence to admonish each other! He is most certainly going to admonish every man, not hesitating to admonish each one night and day for years, so that he might present every man complete in Christ, put into possession of the holiness without which no one will see the Lord!

Conclusion

And we ought to do the same. As we consider this great philosophy of ministry from Colossians 1:28–29—this focus on Christian discipleship—we must not shy away from admonishing one another in accordance with the truth. Dear friends, don't hate your brothers and sisters by hiding instruction from them. Don't sabotage the health of the church by letting sin go unchecked—first of all in your own life, and then in the lives of your fellow believers.

And if someone has the courage to admonish you, receive it graciously and gratefully. Don't hate discipline and instruction and earn the reputation of a fool. Instead, seek out admonition. Desire correction. Invite rebuke and reproof. They're oil upon the head that refreshes and sweetens. Friends, hate sin enough—and love Christ enough—to seek out ways of having sin exposed in your own life.

Don't hate discipline. Pursue holiness—the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Because that is what the whole of the Christian life is about: rightly seeing, and knowing, and enjoying, and worshiping the Lord Jesus in a manner that He is worthy of.