

Instruct and Admonish One Another

Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16

Remember the main thrust of these many sermons on the one-another commands in the Bible. The repeated theme is in the obvious meaning of those simple words, “one another.” These past ten weeks we have identified various ways in which God, in his word, calls us to related to one another. We have maybe eight more to go, so we’re about half-way through. Serve one another. Encourage one another. Bear with one another. And ultimately, in summary, we will study the command to love one another.

In one sense, it is not hard to see how those things all fit the one-another context. They are easily seen to be mutual responsibilities, one-another responsibilities. But this morning that mutual nature of our duty isn’t quite so obvious. Teach one another. Or, with the exact words of my sermon title, instruct one another. And then even admonish one another. More often, more frequently in the Bible, we are used to seeing those things in a one-way context. One person teaches, the other learns. One person instructs, the other receives instruction. In fact, teaching is a specific spiritual gift, a specific work and ministry within the church, a responsibility given to some but not all.

1 Cor. 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”

Eph. 4:11 “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the

edifying of the body of Christ.”

He gave some to be teachers; some, not all. James is pretty clear,

James 3:1 “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

There is even this restriction that church is given to follow, 1 Tim. 2:12 “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

But today, we read that we are to teach one another.

Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

So what does that mean? How is that different from the more distinct and authoritative teaching that recognizes the special office and responsibility of a teacher in the church? Let me begin by emphasizing that I don’t believe it is left to a choice between one or the other. In other words, though our focus will be upon teaching one another, I do not deny who wholeheartedly affirm the more formal and established role of teaching in the church, especially that which given to the one we might appropriately call the teaching elder.

1 Tim. 5:17 “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

The Greek word translated “doctrine” there is really the word “teaching”. It is the same root as the word for teacher. Thus some elders labor to be teachers of God’s word. We usually call them ministers, or pastors. It is the office I hold within this church,

and that is the calling the ministry which God has given to me in this place. As I read from Ephesians 4, God gave some in the church to be “pastors and teachers.” I affirm that wholeheartedly.

And I also affirm wholeheartedly that there is another sense, a complimentary sense, in which we are to be engaged in,

I. THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING ONE ANOTHER.

That is our focus this morning. So what is involved in that? Look again at,

Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another...”

The basic idea of teaching there is what I describe as,

A. Instructing with positive truth.

A positive instruction. Teaching you something that you didn’t know before, adding to your knowledge or your understanding. Particularly, especially, with reference to the word of God. Isn’t that what Paul says as he introduces the idea of teaching one another, that “the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”

So there is to be the teaching of the church, the teaching of the teachers ordained by God in the church. But there is also to be occasion to teach one another.

Heb. 10:24 “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Exhorting one another, expressing a form of teaching. That is to have its place within the church, and we do it when we do not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together.”

I surely hope that you are not unwilling to learn from one another! Surely, I accept the role God has given me and the responsibility which is mine to teach. I hope and pray, and believe with confidence, that has been useful among you. I recognize the authority with which I preach, especially when I proclaim God’s word when preaching from this pulpit. I’m committed to all of that. But you are to teach one another. To put that another way, you are to learn from one another. Positive truth, the truth of God’s word, as an outworking of your normal, everyday interaction with one another.

You are also called by God to admonish one another. To offer and provide,

B. Correction by verbal warning.

Teaching and admonishing, according to Colossians 3:16. That same word translated “admonishing” is used in,

Rom. 15:14 “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.”

Admonish one another. Such a fascinating word. Literally it means something like “to put in mind.” To put an idea in your mind, and the word came to imply a sense of warning. So that which I am putting in your mind, if I am admonishing you, is a warning. Something needs correcting. Something needs to be fixed. Something is in error, and a verbal correction is called for.

Speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul writes in,

Acts 20:31 “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

Warn. Correct. Admonish. The same word is used as a duty of parents,

Eph. 6:4 “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to

wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Admonition. Verbal correction. Warning. Surely children require much of that. And we are to be engaged in that in our relationships with one another. And according to Romans 15, you are qualified to do so, you ordinary Christians who are members of Christ’s church, you are “able also to admonish one another.” But you might not think so! You might not think yourself qualified, so let’s look at what Paul identifies as those qualifications.

II. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING ONE ANOTHER.

Our focus here is again,

Rom. 15:14 “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.”

So much in that verse, but note the obvious first reason for Paul’s confidence in these Roman Christians. He writes that “you also are full of goodness.” So the qualification for those able to admonish one another is,

A. The evidence of moral goodness.

So what is this goodness? Is it even something that we can attain? I know Jesus says,

Mat. 19:17 “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.”

But does that mean that we have no goodness ourselves? In terms of justification, I need to answer clearly, “no.” There is none good, no not one. There is none of us whose goodness is sufficient to gain any merit or to earn any blessing from God. But the concept of goodness in the Bible isn’t a binary topic, that

either you have it or you don’t. Rather, it describes the quality of your life. And Paul is free to say to these Roman Christians, with confidence, that they are full of goodness.

Goodness is also included as a fruit of the spirit, a work of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.

Gal. 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.”

Similarly,

Eph. 5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”

So the evidence of moral goodness in our lives is nothing less than the evidence of the work of God in our lives. And I call it moral goodness because it is defined by God’s moral law. And that standard, that goal, is held up before us as a worthy aspiration for our lives, goodness. And while none of us can claim perfection in terms of absolute goodness, yet we still can press on to that goal.

Phil. 3:12 “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

So press on, in the pursuit of goodness. And as you do, as you gain the personal experience of goodness in the practical exercise of your life, you will be qualified to teach one another, to

admonish one another, to instruct one another. But Paul identifies a second qualification,

B. A sufficient foundation of knowledge with wisdom.

Rom. 15:14 “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.”

Filled with all knowledge—that’s a lofty goal, but such a worthy pursuit. Again, the idea is not that there is some finite amount of knowledge that you must attain, or could attain, as if, then, you had everything possible to possess in the realm of knowledge. That’s nonsense, of course, but in terms of maturity, in terms of sanctification as a Christian, in terms of your own advancement and growth in grace, what a great thing it would be for someone to say of you that you are “full of goodness.” What a glorious testimony of the work of God in your life, that you would be perceived as being full of goodness. Not just a pretense of a religious appearance, not just an external show put on for the approval of others, but true, inward, sincere moral goodness as the consequence of God’s influence upon your life.

There is no secret where this knowledge comes from, nor how you might receive it. As Paul urges Timothy,

2 Tim. 2:15 “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Knowledge and wisdom comes from God’s own word. A word which Paul describes this way,

2 Tim. 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Paul connects this knowledge with the idea of wisdom in, Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another...”

Wisdom can be defined as the ability to apply the truth of God’s word. It is the practical effect of knowledge in the everyday outworking of life. And Paul certainly connects the two. You must have a sufficient foundation of knowledge, but not just head knowledge, as we put it today. Not just intellectual knowledge, and certainly not anything of the arrogance of self-righteous knowledge that causes you to be puffed up with pride. But true wisdom, wisdom from above as James would put it; wisdom built upon the solid foundation of the truth of God’s word, applied diligently and consistently in all the daily affairs of your life.

Beloved, that should be your objective. That should be the reputation you wish to gain, that you also would be full of goodness. And with that qualification, then competent to admonish one another! That is what I am identifying as the third qualification.

C. A competency of ability.

You are able to admonish. You are competent to do so. Literally the word is power, you have the power to do so, the ability, to teach one another, both in terms of instruction with positive truth and correction by verbal warning.

It doesn’t mention anything about advanced educational or theological degrees, nor even seminary training. Those may well be helpful, but those are not the qualifications Paul identifies. These verses don’t mention professional credentials either, nothing of the sort. You, the Christian whom God has redeemed by the blood of Jesus, you are competent to teach and admonish one another,. And you are able to do so when there is in your life

the evidence of moral goodness and a sufficient foundation of knowledge and wisdom. And those things are to define the ordinary pursuit and accomplishment of the ordinary Christian living an ordinary life.

Rom. 15:14 “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.”

Finally, let me emphasize,

III. THE CONTEXT FOR TEACHING ONE ANOTHER.

And by that I mean, the big picture. The meta narrative. Not just a list of the specific qualifications, but the overall picture of how this happens and what it actually looks like. And I want to begin that with a reminder to call for humility. The ability to teach and admonish one another is not an ability that should cause you to be proud, but rather the absence of that pride is more accurately identified as the broad context in which you are, indeed, found competent and able to teach and admonish one another.

I’ve read Colossians 3:16 frequently this morning. Let me know read the context for those words. Paul writes,

Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

But look at who he is writing to, how he describes them. Notice especially his emphasis upon,

A. A humble self-awareness.

Col. 3:12 “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness,

longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

That’s the context for being able to instruct and admonish one another. Those are the people who are able to do so, those who have “put on tender mercies.” Those who display “kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.” Those who “put on love.”

There is, with all those words, a great focus upon humility, a humble self-awareness. That’s where your competency comes to teach one another!

We usually think of good teachers as those who have great gifts. Those who have great outward skill and ability. Those who have a pleasing personality or demeanor. Those who can speak well, or write well. But here is the more appropriate context for this calling and duty to admonish one another—Paul’s words to put on humility, meekness, longsuffering.

So the context is not one of condemnation, not one of self-righteousness or spiritual pride, but one of deep and personal fellowship with others within the body of Christ. This is an expression of Christian love. There is no hint in any of this of the presence of sinful anger or even the sharp tongue which so many people might be tempted to display. When Paul writes to the Galatians with a similar instruction, the word there is even translated restore.

Gal. 6:1 “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.”

Thus this commitment and obligation to instruct one another comes in the context of,

B. A commitment to taking your place within the body of Christ.

So one final thought about this context for instructing and admonishing one another—you have to be together! These words are all descriptive of our corporate identity, our existence as a church body. So if you are going to admonish one another, correct them, or more positively, simply instruct them, you have to be engaged with them. You have to talk to them.

That context is obvious in Colossians 3. When he writes in verse 15, he is writing to the church as assembled together.

Col. 3:15 “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

Even more clearly is the reference to our being together, meeting together, in,

Heb. 10:24 “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.”

The writer then adds that familiar phrase,
Heb. 10:25 “...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

The broader context of Hebrews 10 is very clear.
Heb. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with

pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

Then back to,

Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

That’s a picture of the functioning of a church body, together. Teaching and admonishing one another is not an isolated activity. Rather, it is the outworking of the practice of Christian fellowship through our personal relationships with one another. The idea is simply this, that Christ would dwell in us richly, together, when we are together as a body, that the peace of God rule in our hearts when we live out our Christian lives together.