

Admonish One Another
Matt. 18:15-20, Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17
Rev. Lynell M. Caudillo
October 29, 2017

I have heard it said that the only difference between a pat on the back and a kick in the pants is about twelve inches! Great wisdom is necessary however, in knowing which one is needed and when and to whom it should be applied!

I have been the recipient of both, have you? I dare say, how we receive either the pat on the back or the kick in the pants, depends on the person administering it, and the spirit in which it is given.

I have received the equivalent of a pat on the back—with the intention of encouraging me—however the tone and attitude that accompanied it let me know that my efforts had left something to be desired. Perhaps what I really needed was a kick in the pants?!

Let's consider why this is an important component of fulfilling God's command to "love one another, as God has loved us".

First, there are occasions in our lives when we need encouragement. Giving a pat on the back is usually much easier than the decision to admonish. Encouraging one another should be part of the fabric of our fellowship—praying for one another, carrying one another's burdens (last week), and Showing forbearance toward one another.

Admonishment is harder for several reasons.

First, admonishment has a bad rap. That is to say, when discussing this at staff meeting Cindy shared the image of her mother with a hand on one hip and the other pointing her finger and shaking it at her—a negative image. She knew she was in trouble and had displeased if not outright disobeyed her mom. (Of course I can't imagine Cindy doing that...!) Commonly we think of admonishment as, at the very least, having negative overtones.

However, by definition, that is NOT what it means.

To admonish:

- To warn, advise or counsel in a gentle, earnest manner
- To give friendly advice or encouragement

Only one source indicated any disapproval or negative overtones to the meaning of the word admonish. Somehow that has come to be the predominant way we understand it.

Biblically I suppose one could say it has both a negative and a positive aspect to it.

The idea of warning is present. But as the passage from Matthew's gospel points out, even people of good faith will have differences. That's a fact. *How we deal with these differences is what matters.*

We are often reluctant to admonish another because we know ourselves to those who as sinners, also fall short. We know our own imperfections and weaknesses. Who are we to point those out to others?

But the context of this mutuality command to admonish one another is in both the context of loving fellowship and worship. The context in the letter to the believers in Colossae is that the Word of God is proclaimed and sung. *The wisdom of the Word informs any admonishment.*

Consider this: Do you and I love one another enough to warn or counsel one another if we observe a behavior or a lack of behavior unbecoming of a disciple of Jesus? If we observe a sister or brother that is heading down a path away from God's desires and will, do we love the person enough to admonish them, lovingly, informed by the Word? Is anything hindering my brother/sister from growing in Christ? Are they wandering off course? If the behavior continues, what are the long term consequences?

To our own detriment, we would often default to talking *about* the problem/person which is gossip, rather than talking *with* the person about the problem, attempting reconciliation and restoration which may be possible through admonishment. *The motivation behind biblical admonishment is love and helping another grow spiritually.*

While we should always welcome, encourage, and forbear one another first, there are rare occasions when we must admonish. However, admonishment requires discernment. It "is reserved for instances when something is preventing a person from growing spiritually. It corrects a course, challenges a problem, confronts resistance to God's word, it addresses attitudes and behaviors that impede growth." (J. Sittser, *Love one Another*, p. 163)

I began by saying that the only difference between a pat on the back and a kick in the pants is about twelve inches! Great wisdom is necessary however, in knowing which one is needed and when and to whom it should be applied!

If we are living out the “mutuality commands”:

Love one another

Welcome...serve...forbear...forgive...confess sin and pray for one another, encourage and bear one another’s burdens...if we are living those out in our day to day life together as a family of faith,

It would seem obvious that the need for encouragement is frequent. Admonishment is needed much less often.

Encouragement is that pat on the back.

Two types of encouragement may be illustrated by Mike Howerton who tells about two different high school football coaches he’d had.

If the team was behind at half time there were two different “pep talks” in the locker room. Put yourself in the shoes of a player on the team and listen. Then tell me which pep talk would motivate or encourage you...

“Coach A” would growl at the team:

“What a bunch of losers. Whaddya say we get your girlfriends suited up; they’d do a better job. You’re an embarrassment to our school and our town...”(and he went on with more humiliating comments.)

As he walked out, all heads were down, several players were near tears.

Enter “Coach B.”

“Coach B” would make eye contact, he began speaking in a moderate tone which would build in intensity:

“I don’t see high school students. I see lions. This locker room is filled with lions. A bunch of lions is called a *pride*. A pride of lions work together...they are majestic to behold, *kings* of the land, and *this is your land*. *You are the pride here*. But there’s one thing I haven’t heard you lions do tonight. *I haven’t heard you roar*. Now we’re gonna go out there, and everyone in this two bit town is gonna hear you roar, *because You are LIONS and Lions ROAR!*”

At this point all eyes were on the coach, as players found their voices joining in a raucous ROAR. Strength surged, confidence soared. Players returned to the field, their faith restored, ready to give their all for the team. (Mike Howerton, [Glorious Mess](#), p 144-45)

Which coach would motivate or encourage you?

We frequently need encouragement in our journey of faith. Admonishment is needed less often.

On his way to deliver a repaired computer to a customer, a Geek Squad employee saw a hand-lettered sign at the entrance to a street. It read:

“Blocked! Do Not Pass! Difficult to Turn Back!” He continued anyway and indeed, discovered that the way was blocked by a fallen tree. With some

difficulty, he turned his vehicle around and backtracked. When he got the cross-street where he had originally turned in, he noticed a second hand-lettered sign. It read: "Told you so!"

On the rare occasion when we need to admonish one another, we would want to avoid a "told-you-so-scenario". Admonishment is motivated by love, with the goal of holding another accountable. The scripture gives some clear guidelines. Matthew 18 indicates it should be *done privately* but involve an elder or two. Furthermore, it should be *done positively, and prayerfully*. It is a way of holding each other accountable in our faith journey and it moves us toward maturity.

Paul Tripp gave his teenage son permission to spend the weekend at a friend's house. But during the weekend, the friend started feeling guilty and told his mother that he was covering for "John", Paul's son. That parent called and informed Paul and his wife that she had no idea where the boy was, but he was not where he'd told his parents he would be.

Paul was angry and upset as he informed his wife. She suggested that he pray.

"I don't think I can pray for him just now", he said.

She replied: "I didn't mean for you to pray for him, I think you need to pray for you."

As Paul sat in his study, he realized that God had already begun a work of rescue in his son's life. The fact that God had pressed on the conscience of his friend to confess to covering up for him, and for the other parent who had the courage to call Paul and his wife. They prayed for wisdom and discernment, asking God to transform their hurt and their son's rebellion.

When the son finally returned, Paul gave him some time. Then he asked him a series of questions. (Personally I think this is brilliant. I'd be inclined to lecture, wouldn't you? Our sons would gladly tell you that they were the recipients of more personalized sermons than their friends, no doubt about it! The occupational hazard of being double PKs--the offspring of two pastors, not just one!)

Paul and his son sat down and Paul asked him:

Do you ever think about how much God loves you?

Do you ever think how much God's grace operates in your daily life?

Do you know how much God's grace was working in your life even this weekend?

"Who told you?" "John asked, knowing that he'd been found out.

Paul replied:

"You have lived your life in the light. You've made good choices. You've been an easy son to parent, but this weekend you took a step toward the darkness. You can live in the darkness if you want. You can... lie and deceive. You can use your friends as your cover ... You can step over God's boundaries. Or you can determine to live in God's light. I'm pleading with you: don't live in the darkness; live in the light."

As [Paul] turned to walk away [he] heard a voice from behind [him] saying, 'Dad, don't go.'

...with tears in his eyes, "John" said:

"Dad, I want to live in the light, but it's so hard. Will you help me?"

(Paul D. Tripp, Forever: Why You Can't Live Without It, p. 151-153)

Sisters and Brothers:

Life is difficult. We are called to love one another—not as the world loves—but as Christ loves us. How does Christ love us?

Sacrificially. Completely. Unconditionally. Grace-Fully.

Only Christ loves us this way.

We love Christ and one another: Imperfectly. Haltingly. Conditionally.

But by God's grace, we are called to

Love one another...

Welcome and serve one another...

Forbear and forgive one another.

Confess our sins to, and pray for one another.

Encourage and bear one another's burdens...

And yes, on our hardest day, to admonish one another.

On the rare occasion when we must admonish one another,

May God give us the discernment and the love that is required—to know the difference between a pat on the back, or a kick in the pants.

May the love and the grace of God flow freely in our midst as we seek to be the body of Christ, the family of faith, the church at its best.

Let us pray...