



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of  
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message  
to the Priests' Wives  
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## **Art of Admonition**

Admonition is a Biblical commandment that must be obeyed. Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us saying, *“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”* (Matthew 18:15). Nevertheless, this commandment, like all other commandments, if obeyed without discernment leads to harm instead of benefit. Therefore, we must learn the art of admonition in order to get the maximum benefit from it which is gaining our brother and keeping love untouched. One of the most amazing Biblical passages that show the benefits of a healthy admonition is a passage of Sirach saying, *“Correct a friend, though perhaps there was a misunderstanding, and he may say,*

*‘I did not do it’. Or, if he did do it, correct him so that he may not do it again. Correct your neighbor, for perhaps he did not say it. But if he did say it, correct him so that he may not say it again. Correct your friend for often a fault has been committed. And do not believe every word. There is one who slips with his word but not with his heart. For who is there who has not offended with his words? Correct your neighbor before you reprimand him. And make a place for the fear of the Most High. For all wisdom is fear of God, and it is wise to fear God, and in all wisdom is the orderly disposition of the law”* (Sirach 19: 13–18); *“How much better is it to reprove than to become angry, so as not to hinder him who may confess in prayer”* (Sirach 20:1). These two passages clarify well that admonition helps clarifying matters, removing confusion and misunderstanding, setting boundaries for the other so that he may not repeat his offence in the future, stopping gossip, understanding the trivial unintended slips of tongue, taking gradual firm steps towards the offender, and getting rid of repressed anger and hatred that may be hidden within one’s heart. In spite of all these psycho-spiritual benefits of



admonition, yet Sirach warn us not to use it in an unhealthy way saying, “*And there is a judgment which does not prove to be good. But there is one who is silent and the same is prudent*” (Sirach 19:28).

### **What are, then, the rules of a healthy Christian admonition?**

(1) “*go and tell him his fault*”: Many people, when offended, gossip about the offender talking to everybody about what he did without going to him directly and reproaching him. Thus, Jesus Christ said, ‘go’ meaning be initiative, go to him with all courage and love, and reprimand him instead of gossiping about him.

(2) “*between you and him alone*”: Wisdom and discernment are well shown here. The aim of admonition is not slander, revenge, or hurt but clarifying matters and removing confusion for the sake of keeping love untouched. Therefore, admonition must be between you and the offender alone. The presence of others would trigger a defensive attitude in him to save his face.

(3) “*you have gained your brother*”: The aim of admonition, which is gaining the brother, must be clear. There are many deviated goals of admonition like for example accusing, attacking, judging, revenging, hurting, desire to defeat the other person, and proving being right. All these deviated goals would lead eventually to defeat of love instead of keeping it. Behold the wise Paul reproaching the Corinthians in a very loving manner saying, “*Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together... Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you*” (2 Corinthians 7: 2–3,12)

(4) **Do not reprimand for every single matter:** When need to learn to discern which matter we must reprimand for and which ones we must let go. Reproaching for every minute thing would quench love. Behold David showing to us how God does not



monitor our iniquities strictly by saying, *“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”* (Psalms 130:3). Therefore, we should not observe others’ iniquities rebuking them for every single slip of tongue or deed.

**(5) Do not accuse:** Accusing means that you made yourself a judge and condemned the other party to be guilty before hearing his defense. *“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”* (John 7:51). Also, accusing someone pushes him to take a defensive attitude as a reaction to feeling attacked.

**(6) Reprimand gently:** There is a huge difference between admonition and hurt. Jesus Christ gave us in many situations a marvelous model of how to reprimand gently. When He wanted to reproach Peter, He said to him, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”* (Matthew 14:31). When He wanted to rebuke Him for denying Him He just turned and looked at Him, and later on after His resurrection, He asked him, *“Do you love Me?”* When He reproached His disciples, He said to them gently, *“What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?”* (Matthew 26:40). Abigail also gave a

wonderful example of wise gentle reproach when she said to David, *“Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand... And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, 31 that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself”* (1 Samuel 25: 26, 30–31)

**(7) Observe your body language when reproaching:** The body language that shows anger does not produce a healthy admonition. Voice tone, eye gaze, and facial grimaces must show peace and love and not anger lest admonition becomes fruitless.

**(8) Learn, you too, to accept admonition:** It is irrational to require others to give you your rights while you do not fulfil your duties. You must learn to accept reproach and apologize when necessary in order for others to accept reproach from you.