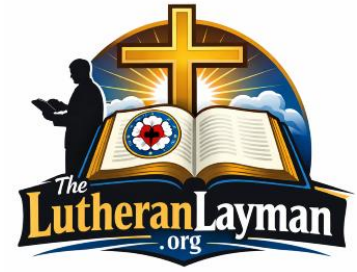


Public or Private Admonition?

*A Guide from Scripture and
the Lutheran Confessions*



According to Scripture, *both* private and public admonition are biblical — but the right choice depends on the situation. The Bible gives clear guidance for when correction should be private, when it must become public, and why the goal is always repentance, restoration, and protection of the flock.

1. Why Do We Admonish?

Biblical purpose:

- To restore the sinner (Galatians 6:1)
- To protect the flock (Acts 20:28–30)
- To preserve the Gospel (Jude 3)

Confessional purpose:

- The Church exercises discipline **“to obtain repentance”** (Augsburg Confession XXVIII).
- Pastors are commanded to **“rebuke openly those who sin”** when necessary (AC XXVIII).
- The Church must correct false doctrine because **“the Gospel is at stake”** (Formula of Concord SD X).

2. Start with PRIVATE admonition when the sin/error is personal or not yet public.

Scripture References

- *“If your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.**”* — Matthew 18:15
- *“If anyone is caught in any transgression, **you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.**”* — Galatians 6:1

Confessional References

The **Small Catechism** teaches the Eighth Commandment as protecting a person’s reputation. Luther says we should:

- “Defend him”
- “Speak well of him”
- “Explain everything in the kindest way”

The **Large Catechism** expands this:

- Public exposure is forbidden unless the sin is already public or harmful.
- Private admonition protects the neighbor and fulfills the commandment.

This establishes the default pattern:

- Go **privately** first
- Speak directly, gently, and truthfully
- Give the person a chance to repent without shame
- Preserve their dignity and avoid unnecessary scandal

Private correction is the norm when:

- The error is not widely known
- The person is teachable
- The issue is relational or personal
- The goal is quiet restoration

This protects the person's dignity and reputation, and avoids unnecessary shame.

Gentleness is required

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." — Galatians 6:1

Love guides private correction

"Love covers a multitude of sins." — 1 Peter 4:8

"Whoever covers an offense seeks love." — Proverbs 17:9

Those who are wise favor private correction first

"Reprove a wise man, and he will love you." — Proverbs 9:8

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." — Proverbs 27:6

SUMMARY: Private admonition is appropriate when:

- The error is not yet public
- The person is teachable
- The issue is personal or relational
- Restoration can happen quietly

If they do not listen: Take Witnesses/Take to The Church

Scripture References

- *"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. **But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'** And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."* — Matthew 18:15-17
- *"Those who persist in sin, **rebuke them in the presence of all.**"* — 1 Timothy 5:20
- *"Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."* — Titus 1:13
- *"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather **expose them.**"* — Eph 5:11

Confessional References

The **Augsburg Confession XXVIII** describes church discipline as a **measured, orderly process**, not impulsive or punitive. Bringing witnesses:

- Ensures fairness
- Prevents misunderstanding
- Protects both parties
- Maintains good order in the church

3. PUBLIC Admonition Is Required When the Error Is Public or Harmful

When false teaching or public sin harms or encourages others in error, Scripture commands **public correction**.

Scripture References

- “Those who persist in sin, **rebuke them in the presence of all.**” — 1 Timothy 5:20
- “Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” — Titus 1:13
- “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather **expose them.**” — Ephesians 5:11
- “Their talk will spread like gangrene.” — 2 Timothy 2:17
- “Mark those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine you have been taught; **avoid them.**” — Romans 16:17
- “I opposed him to his face... **before them all.**” — Galatians 2:11–14
 - ☞ The apostle Paul corrected Peter publicly and immediately, because Peter’s error was **public** and was **leading others astray**.
- “Be alert for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... *fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples.*” — Acts 20:28–30.
 - ☞ The apostle Paul commands shepherds to **protect their flock from errorists**.

Confessional References

The Formula of Concord XXVIII insists that public false teaching must be publicly corrected, because:

- “False doctrine cannot be tolerated in the Church of God.”
- “The Gospel is endangered when error is allowed to spread.”

*The Large Catechism (Eighth Commandment) teaches that public sin **must** be addressed publicly because it is already known and harmful.*

SUMMARY: Public admonition is appropriate when:

- The error is public
- Others are being misled
- The gospel is being distorted
- The church must be protected

4. Overall Summary

Private admonition

✓ When the sin is personal ✓ When the error is not yet public ✓ When restoration can happen quietly ✓ When love can “cover” the matter (1 Peter 4:8)

Public admonition

✓ When the error is public ✓ When others are being harmed ✓ When false teaching spreads ✓ When private correction has failed ✓ When shepherds must protect the flock (Acts 20:28–30)

Both the PRIVATE and PUBLIC approaches are biblical. The context determines the method. The response determines the tone (Using Law vs. Gospel).