Question: What is the difference between admonishing and rebuking?

Answer: Let’s begin with Scripture.

> *2 Timothy 4:1–2 (ESV)*
> “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

Here, Paul instructs Timothy to minister God’s Word faithfully. Importantly, he uses three distinct verbs: reprove, rebuke, and exhort, which reflect different levels of correction and spiritual guidance.

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1. Admonishing (Reprove)

Definition: Admonishing is pointing out a fault or sin in a way that corrects, instructs, and guides the sinner toward repentance. It is

corrective but often gentle, with a teaching component.

- Example: A mother may admonish a child for laziness, explaining that laziness is harmful and could have long-term consequences. She may also give guidance on how to improve.
- Biblical basis: Ephesians 6:4 instructs parents to bring up children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,” combining correction with teaching.

Admonishment aligns with God’s heart of patient correction (2 Peter 3:9). It allows believers to recognize their faults, learn from them, and grow spiritually. New believers, being spiritually immature, often need admonishment rather than strict rebuke.

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2. Rebuking

Definition: Rebuking is a stronger, authoritative correction. It condemns sin and commands that it cease immediately. Rebuke is not a suggestion or advice—it carries authority.

- Example: A mother rebukes a child for stealing, clearly commanding that it must never happen again.
- Societal example: Governments rebuke acts like murder, corruption, or rape, declaring them unlawful.

Biblical basis:

> • *1 Corinthians 5:11–13 (ESV):*
> "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality, or greed, or idolatry, or reviling, or drunkenness, or swindling—not even to eat with such a one... 'Purge the evil person from among you.'"

Here, rebuke can involve temporary exclusion for persistent, unrepentant sin to preserve the holiness of the church.

Rebuke is rooted in God's holiness and justice. It prevents the spread of sin in the church (1 Corinthians 5:6–7) and reflects the authority of Christ (Matthew 18:15–17). It is necessary for both individual correction and corporate purity.

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3. Admonishing vs. Rebuking in Practice

Aspect	Admonishing	Rebuking
Purpose	Correct gently, instruct, guide	Condemn sin, command it to stop, protect the church
Approach	Gentle, educational, persuasive	Firm, authoritative, commanding

Aspect	Admonishing	Rebuking
When used	Minor faults, spiritual immaturity, early correction	Serious sins, persistent disobedience, protection of church
Biblical examples	Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:16	1 Corinthians 5:11–13, 2 Timothy 4:2
Goal	Spiritual growth and learning	Holiness, accountability, correction, restoration

Even Jesus Himself rebukes when His followers stray (Revelation 3:19). Rebuke is never harsh vindictiveness; it is righteous, restorative discipline motivated by love (Hebrews 12:6).

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4. Rebuking and Spiritual Authority

The concept of rebuke also applies to demonic activity:

> • *Luke 9:42 (ESV):*
> "And when Jesus had rebuked the unclean spirit, it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly."

Here, rebuke is authoritative; it commands the spirit to leave. It is a spiritual command, not a request. Similarly, believers exercise spiritual authority over sin and the enemy, reflecting God's

dominion (Luke 10:19).

Conclusion

1. Admonish (Reprove): Gentle correction with teaching; for minor faults or spiritual immaturity.
2. Rebuke: Firm, authoritative command to stop sin; necessary for serious, persistent disobedience or spiritual protection.
3. Both are essential for spiritual growth, holiness, and church discipline, in accordance with God's Word and love.

"May the Lord bless and guide us to use His Word faithfully to admonish, rebuke, and restore in love."

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