

"I CEASED NOT TO WARN EVERYONE"

The title of this article is from a speech made by the apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus. It is recorded in Acts 20. He was reminding them of his preaching and teaching while he was working with them. He had come there and established the church and for three years he continued to teach them. He was continually making known to them duties and responsibilities, and warning them of the consequences of sin and unfaithfulness. He had "not shunned to declare...all the counsel of God" (v32), and had "kept back nothing that was profitable" to them (v20). In short, he was a courageous and faithful servant of the Lord.

In the Old Testament Ezekiel, the priest of God, was told by the Lord. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: Therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul" (Eze. 3:17-21).

Ezekiel could have excused himself by saying the people would not listen. But the Lord precluded that in the previous chapter. He said, "And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: For they are most rebellious" (Eze. 2:7).

A warning would serve two purposes. (1) It would make the person warned aware of the sin and the consequence of it. (2) It would make Ezekiel free from the blood of the individual warned. It was primarily for the benefit of the person warned, but it also benefited the one doing the warning by keeping him free from guilt.

In the New Testament it was the apostle Paul who wrote to the Thessalonians, "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts" (1 Thes. 2:4). He writes to the Galatians, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). The apostle was a servant of Christ, not a politician. He was not out to please men, but God. Paul was not interested in popularity, but the salvation of souls. Thus, he wrote the Corinthians, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). We have insight of his attitude when he writes to these same people, "Therefore seeing that we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:1,2).

When the apostle addressed the elders of Ephesus, he could boldly assert, "I am pure of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26,27). "...I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (v 31).

To Timothy, a preacher of the gospel, Paul wrote, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained" (1 Tim. 4:11). To Titus he writes, "These things speak, and exhort and rebuke with all authority" (Tit. 2:15). In Paul's second letter to Timothy he wrote, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine....For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.... And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4). He also informs us that men would be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). I believe that all honest men can agree that we are living in such a time.

When Jesus was on earth He preached. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). But all men do not take kindly to instruction. Jesus was crucified for His teaching. John the Baptist was beheaded for the truth he spoke. And Stephen, a faithful disciple of Christ, was stoned to death for preaching the truth to the Jews. And when Paul writes to the Galatians, he asks, "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Truth only makes friends of those who want to know and do what's right.

It is dangerous for one not to love the truth — all of it. Because of a wrong attitude some “changed the truth of God into a lie” (Rom. 1:25). Paul said of others, “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thes. 2:10-12).

The wise man of the Bible, Solomon, declares, “Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7). The man who does not want to be warned of sin nor instructed in righteous living is foolish and jeopardizes his own salvation. The word of God teaches us, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Remember, Paul told the elders of Ephesus, “I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.” And if we love the souls of men and women and want to see them saved, neither will we cease to preach the truth and warn people of the need of doing what is right.