

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Give Them a Warning From Me" (Colossians 1:28)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/18/2010

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Introduction

We live in a world that is full of warning labels. In fact, the world is so full of warning signs and warning labels that sometimes we just tend to ignore them, or not even see them.

Some of them are ridiculous. Some of them make you wonder what the manufacturer of a product was thinking. This warning was on a hair curling iron: "Warning: Unit may become hot." A baby stroller had this one: "Warning: Remove occupants from stroller before folding it." Another product had this warning: "Do not use this product if you cannot see clearly enough to read the information in this instruction booklet."

Other warnings, of course are much more serious, and they need to be taken seriously. If we ignore the warning signs of disease in the body, it can lead to a serious or even fatal illness. If a child ignores a parent's warning to stay out of the street, it could result in injury or even death. If an airline pilot ignores the warnings from his navigation system that he is flying too low, it could result in disaster.

As we've been studying Colossians chapter one, verse twenty-eight, we've seen that the Apostle Paul says that one of the main things that he does in his ministry is to warn people. He says, we preach Christ, "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we present every man perfect [or complete] in Christ Jesus."

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The note of warning is one of the hallmarks of genuine, Bible-centered, Christ-centered preaching. But that note of warning is missing in many churches today. And the reason for that is that warnings tend to be negative. Warnings – if they are Biblical warnings – tend to put the finger on things in our lives that many people in today's church don't want God to put His finger upon. People don't want God to put His finger upon their un-Biblical worship. They don't want God to put His finger upon their ungodly lifestyles. They don't want God to put His finger upon their worldly ways of thinking. They want to be left alone. They want to be told, "You're okay, you have nothing to worry about. You can come to God just as you are, and you can stay just as you are. Nothing in your life needs to change unless you think it's a good idea."

But that's not what God's Word says. Paul says, we are "warning every man." What Paul is saying is that every Christian needs to be warned. Christ must be preached, because every Christian needs to be warned. Now, in our last message we looked at the word that is translated "warning" here in Colossians 1:28. We saw that the word that Paul uses here means to impart understanding, to instill a way of thinking, and to do that in such a way that this new understanding, this new way of thinking, will have a corrective influence on a person. The idea is to set someone right in his thinking, in areas where his thinking has been wrong.

It's the same thought that is behind the Greek word for repentance – *metanoia*, a change of mind. It's the same thought that is behind Paul's exhortation in Romans chapter twelve, verse two: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be

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transformed by the renewing of your mind” – literally, the renovation of your mind, a complete change in your way of thinking.

The note of solemn warning is a hallmark of genuine Biblical preaching. And I want to point out five things about the nature of this note of warning that is to be an indispensable element in Biblical preaching.

God’s Word: The Source of Warnings

First, God has given His Word as the source of warnings. David speaks of this in Psalm 19, beginning at verse 7, where we read this:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

And then notice this, verse eleven:

Moreover by them [by the Word of God] Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be

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blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:7-14)

"Who can understand his errors?" In my flesh, David says, I am often blind to my own errors. I do things that displease God, and often I'm not even aware of it. I need your Word, O Lord, as the source of warnings to correct me, to warn me, to change my thinking, to make we aware of sin, to make we aware of the things that tend toward sin, to keep me from sin, to keep sin from having dominion over me, from controlling me.

And therefore he cries out, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Strength and My Redeemer." Use Your Word to warn me, O Lord, so that this will be true of me.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians writes about the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness. In chapter ten of First Corinthians he reminds them of the Old Testament record concerning the children of Israel. He reminds the Corinthians how God warned the Israelites about their disobedience, and they experienced various perils and plagues in the wilderness because of it. But they persisted in their sin and their unbelief, and finally God said, "I've had enough. You've ignored my warnings. You've persisted in your sin. And so this unbelieving generation is going to die right here in the wilderness. You will never see the Promised Land. Your children will go in, but you will not.

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And what does Paul say about this? In First Corinthians chapter ten, verse eleven, he says, "Now all these things happened to them [to the Israelites] as examples, and they were written for our admonition..." And the word translated "admonition" here is the same root word that we have translated as "warning" in Colossians 1:28. These things about Israel were written as a warning to us.

Paul is saying this: Take heed, Corinthian church! You're straying from the faith, you're going off into all kinds of wrong thinking and evil behavior. Remember what happened to the Israelites! Take it as a warning! You cannot persist in the things you are doing, you cannot keep on tolerating open sin within the church, without consequences from the hand of God.

So this is point number one: God has given His Word as the source of warnings. We could cite many other examples, but I want to move on so that we can cover the remaining points.

Prophets and Preachers: The Messengers of Warning

Our second point about the note of warning as a hallmark of Biblical preaching, as an essential element in Biblical preaching, is this: God ordained prophets and preachers to be the messengers of warning.

We see this, first of all, in the Old Testament prophets. God ordained these men to be watchmen. He commissioned them to give a warning to the people of Israel and

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Judah about their sins and their unfaithfulness, and about the consequences if they would not turn back to God and follow His Word.

God gave this commission to the prophet Ezekiel, and it is typical of the kind of commission that He gave to all of His prophets. In Ezekiel chapter three, beginning at verse seventeen, God says this to the prophet:

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

“Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 3:17-21)

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The Old Testament prophet was to be a watchman. He was to deliver a warning. He was to warn the wicked man about his wickedness. He was to warn the righteous man when he turned from the path of righteousness. If the prophet warned the wicked man, and the wicked man did not turn from his sin, God did not hold the prophet responsible. The prophet had done his job. He had given the warning. The response to the warning was the hearer's responsibility. But if the prophet failed to give the warning, and the wicked man remained in his sin, God held the prophet responsible. His blood, God said, shall be upon your hands.

The same was true in the case of the righteous man. If the prophet gave the warning, God would not hold the prophet responsible for the failure of the righteous man to heed the warning. But if the prophet failed to give the warning, God would hold the prophet responsible. Again, God said, his blood shall be upon your hands because you were an unfaithful prophet. You failed to do your job.

And as we come over to the New Testament, we see the same thing. As the Apostle Paul was leaving the region of the church at Ephesus, we read in Acts chapter twenty that he called the elders of the church together, and he said this to them:

"I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

I have fulfilled my commission from God, Paul says. I have not failed to warn you. I have not failed to declare to you the whole counsel of God – all that His Word

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proclaims. And then Paul says, I'm going to give you a final word of warning as I am leaving you, because I am leaving for the last time, and you will not see me again this side of Heaven. And so Paul says to them, Acts chapter twenty, verse twenty-eight:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage 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 after themselves.

“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:28-32)

Paul knew that as a minister of the Gospel of Christ, as a minister of the Word of God, as the servant of Jesus Christ, as one who had been given a commission and a calling by God – he had a responsibility to deliver a warning. And I've done that, Paul says. And therefore, he says, “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”

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And Paul says the same thing to the Corinthian church. He uses the Word of God to put the finger on their sin. And in First Corinthians chapter four, verse fourteen, he says, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you." I'm not writing these things in order to simply embarrass you. If that's all it does, Paul is saying, I haven't accomplished anything.

No – "as my beloved children I warn you." My objective is to bring about a change in you. I don't want you to remain in this un-spiritual state that you're in. I don't want you to continue behaving like unbelievers. I want to set you right in your thinking. I want you to have a change of mind. I want you to repent. I want you to stop being conformed to the world. I want you to have a renovation of your thinking, so that you will forsake the ways of the world, and follow after Christ as you did when you first believed. I want you to return to your first love.

That was how Paul preached. That was how Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. And what was the result? His hearers were "cut to the heart," and they cried out, "What do we need to do? What needs to change?"

A Word to Preachers

And let me say a word to any preacher who may be listening to this message today. Does your preaching have this keynote of warning? Not as a matter of browbeating people, not merely to embarrass people, not so that you can promote your own agenda. But does your preaching have this true, Biblical keynote of a solemn warning from the Word of God within it? Do you understand that it is your

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calling, it is your commission, to deliver a warning from God? Are you true to that calling? Can you honestly say with the Apostle Paul, "I testify to you his day that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"?

Or are you backing away from that? Are you afraid you'll offend people? Are you afraid people will leave your congregation? That was not Paul's attitude. That was not the attitude of the Old Testament prophets. Some of them said, "Lord, if I deliver Your message to these people, they'll kill me." But God always said – "Preach it! Say it! Don't hold back! Do as I tell you! And I'll take care of the rest." Preacher friend, is that your attitude today? Are you willing to preach the whole counsel of God without apology? Are you willing to deliver God's warnings to every Christian? And are you willing to trust God for the results? That is what you need to do.

A Word to Hearers

And let me also say a word to every believer today – and this is our third point about the keynote of warning as an essential component of Biblical preaching. First, we saw that God has given His Word as the source of warnings. Second, we saw that God has ordained prophets and preachers to be the messengers of warning.

The third point we see is this: Believers are to have a proper attitude toward God's messengers of warning. We read of this in First Thessalonians chapter five, beginning at verse twelve. Paul says this: "We urge you, brethren, to recognize those

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who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

When Paul speaks of those who labor among you in this context, he is speaking of preachers and teachers. He calls them those who "are over you in the Lord." What this means is that he is speaking of those whom God has set over you as spiritual protectors and guardians, those to whom God has given responsibility for your spiritual care.

And then Paul calls them, those who "admonish you." And that word "admonish" is the same word we have translated as "warning" in Colossians 1:28. These men are those who warn you.

And, Paul says, "recognize those who labor among you" in this way. That word "recognize" literally means, "pay attention to them." Pay attention to the solemn warnings that these called men of God deliver to you from the Word of God. When they speak from the Word, when they deliver a warning from the Word, they are speaking on God's behalf.

Believer, are you doing this? Are you paying attention when the Word is faithfully preached? Are you listening to the warnings from the Word – and not just listening to them, but taking heed, letting the Word of God change your thinking, letting it set you right in the areas where you are off the mark?

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In our next message we're going to pick up at this point, because our next two points have to do with the fact that the reading and hearing of God's warnings from His Word means that we as believers also have a responsibility to warn one another, and the reading and preaching of the Word equips us to do that. And then we're going to look at some specific warnings that the Apostle Paul gives to the Colossian church – and we're going to see that those warnings to the Colossian believers are warnings to you as well.

About the Broadcast

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