

Dangers on the Safe Side (Part 1): Avoiding Controversy

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Galatians 2:11-14

This is the first lesson in a series about dangers that exist “on the safe side.” This phrase means “avoiding danger, with a margin for error.” Sometimes this is fine or even wise, but there is a difference between wisdom and safety. Sometimes they overlap, but not always. At times, staying “on the safe side” is actually dangerous. Erring on the side of caution can cause us to err when it leads to fear and compromise or results from a lack of faith. Faithfulness often requires us to venture out of safety. We must do God’s will regardless of the danger.

The “Safe Side” – Avoiding Controversy

- Paul spoke of the time when he needed to confront Cephas/Peter (Galatians 2:11-14) – Cephas used to eat with the Gentiles; this was right and he knew it (Acts 10:28; 11:2-17); yet when certain men from James arrived, he withdrew; he feared the party of the circumcision
- These were ones who required Gentile Christians to be circumcised – Paul opposed this (Galatians 2:3-5); yet Peter did not want to stand up to them; others, including Barnabas, were carried away; by compromising in this way, he was not being “straightforward about the truth of the gospel”
- Why would this be seen as “safe” – it preserved his relationship with and reputation among those in the party

Why This Is Tempting

- Controversy is demanding – it requires us to contend (Jude 3); this requires preparation (Ephesians 6:14-17)
- Taking a stand requires decisiveness – we must know what we believe (1 Peter 3:15); this requires study (2 Timothy 2:15)
- Taking a stand makes us a target – sometimes others won’t stand with us (2 Timothy 4:16)

Why This Is Dangerous

- Error is spread unchecked – it spreads like gangrene/cancer (2 Timothy 2:16-18)
- Truth will be abandoned by some – could be a gradual drift (Hebrews 2:1) or a quick desertion (Galatians 1:6-7)
- We jeopardize our soul with silence – as a watchman, Ezekiel would be held accountable for silence (Ezekiel 3:17-18)

What to Do Instead

- Rather than allowing error to spread unchecked – false teachers must be silenced (Titus 1:9-11)
- Rather than sitting back while some abandon the truth – contend (Jude 3); encourage (2 Timothy 2:3)
- Rather than jeopardizing our soul with silence – declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27)

Conclusion

- Controversy is not pleasant – but it exists and we must be willing to take a stand
- Truth is truth, even if some find it controversial – yet we must believe, teach, and practice the truth to be saved