

Dangers on the Safe Side (Part 3): Adding Rules

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Colossians 2:20-23

This is the third 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” – Adding Rules

- Paul questioned these brethren about submitting to rules that others were imposing upon them (Colossians 2:21) – these were religious rules (Colossians 2:16); he called this “self-made religion” (Colossians 2:23); they were man’s rules, not God’s; not according to God’s will
- These fell under the category of the “elementary principles of the world” (Colossians 2:20) – this was captivity (Colossians 2:8; cf. Galatians 2:3-5); Christ came to set us free from such things; yet it is tempting to create/enforce these types of rules upon others
- Why this would be seen as “safe” – it would avoid anything “questionable” (for ourselves or others), supposedly keeping us (or others) further from sin

Why This Is Tempting

- It has the appearance of wisdom – yet what “seems right” is not always right (Proverbs 14:12)
- It elevates us above others – we may do this to be noticed by others (Matthew 6:1) because we desire attention (Matthew 23:2-7)
- It is not necessarily “wrong” on a personal level – Paul made a “rule” for himself that he knew he could not impose upon others (1 Corinthians 9:12-18)

Why This Is Dangerous

- It is “self-made religion” – “will worship” (KJV); it causes us to convert people to US, not to God (Matthew 23:15); and it will often make it harder to convert people in the first place
- It makes our worship worthless – not holding opinions, but binding them upon others (Matthew 15:9)

- Eventually, we will not be able to tell the difference between our rules and God's – to the Pharisees, the “tradition of the elders” was equal to the law of God (Matthew 15:2, 6)

What to Do Instead

- Rather than inventing our own rules, we need to follow God's will – our rules are inferior (Matthew 7:21-23; 5:20)
- Rather than worshiping in vain, we must worship in spirit and truth – as God desires (John 4:24; Colossians 3:17)
- Rather than elevating our rules to the place of God's, we need to allow for personal opinions – we are not to pass judgment over matters of opinion (Romans 14:1-4)

Conclusion

- Being “too loose” (previous lesson) and “too strict” are related – both elevate our thinking to the level of God's
- Let us respect God and His word – faithfully follow Him without binding our opinions on others