

# THE EXTREMIST

By

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**“And Mary said unto the angel, how shall this be,  
seeing as I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34).**

I say it reverently. God is an extremist. From the tragic and devastating sentence pronounced upon Adam and his expulsion from the Garden to the execution of Jesus on a Roman cross, the actions of God have been to the extreme.

When compared to the ideas and activities of man, the plans, purposes and wonders produced by God are utterly extreme. This is one reason why the pursuit of true faith and the life of real Christianity is becoming more rare all the time. Our age does not believe in extremes. But the purpose and the intention of God is of such a nature that it requires a man to go to extremes in order to pursue God's program. One cannot serve God and mammon. Christianity requires a break with the “mammon of unrighteousness” in order to follow the truth of God. Any break with the system of this world is an extreme action. Therefore Christian faith requires extreme measures.

The extreme nature of God is first expressed in the message to Adam and Eve in the garden when God imposed the death penalty for disobedience. “Thou shalt surely die”. This was the penalty for eating of the forbidden tree. Modern man would not have it so. “But why not try the fruit? God is narrow-minded. We're only human. Nobody's perfect. Besides, it is a tree of knowledge, and everyone knows- that education is our only hope. Adam and Eve didn't really know any better. It was their first offense. Capital punishment is uncivilized. They couldn't help it. But God, the designer and builder of man, called the laws into order, and that law was upheld in the day of Adam's sin, as it will be upheld in the Day of Judgment.

God's attitude in Noah's time was extreme. Surely there were more than eight people left on earth who were worth saving! But God could see no hope for humanity except through this one family which had courageously held faith with Him in spite of persecution by society around them. It is said that man's extremity is God's opportunity, but in this case, man's extreme sin led God to the extreme act of judgment: the destruction of the whole pack, except for Noah's family, with an unprecedented rain and flood,

For Lot and his family to be uprooted from their home in Sodom was extreme cruelty. On top- of that was the death of Lot's wife, when she turned back to the city. But what of the city itself? The scriptures tell us that the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah “are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7).

Undoubtedly Abraham considered God's command to him to be extreme. “Take now thy son, thy only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and

offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Genesis 22:2). An unbelievably extreme command! But Abraham was acquainted with God by now. He knew that God does not kid around, that He is the Absolute, and that His Word is not only law but the execution of law. It was because of Abraham’s willingness to follow the extreme and seemingly unreasonable command of God in slaying his own son, that he became known as the father of the faithful. As he proved his faith, God stopped the act of sacrifice, and saved Isaac’s life.

God’s prophets were extremists. Consider Elijah who was chased out of the country by Jezebel and fed by the ravens. Think of his contest on Mt. Carmel when God answered his prayer with fire from heaven, proving that Elijah was the true prophet and the prophets of Baal were imposters. With God’s approval the whole lot of them were slain. Consider Jeremiah, writing from a dirty miserable dungeon, and Hosea who for the sake of an object lesson to Israel was commanded to remarry the woman who had left him for the gutters of prostitution. Extreme measures, all.

One of the most extreme acts of God is that one which we celebrate this month; the birth of Jesus. Here was a young and innocent girl, the purest of the pure, engaged to a chaste young man who would have cut off his hand before allowing an unchaste action toward the girl he adored. Like any other young couple they planned their wedding with all its gay festivities and warm hearty wishes of their friends and relatives.

But God in His infinite power and without asking their consent placed in the womb of this young innocent virgin-the life of a man. Could there have been a more drastic means of His entering into the stream of human life? Consider the excessive shame and pain borne by Joseph when he found that Mary was with child. (According to law, he could have had her stoned to death.) Imagine, if possible, the humiliation to Mary, especially when she was innocent. Who would believe her? Can anyone fathom the pathos of her question, ‘How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?’ (Luke 1:34). She could not even attempt to explain it, for she knew that to declare her innocence in the face of the well known “laws of nature” would only make her appear stupid on top of being sinful.

Moreover, the extremities did not end with her humiliation. The long- weary trip to Bethlehem, the rejection at the inn, the discomfort- sheer misery to her-of the stable, and the shock of childbirth (in a stable) were as nothing compared to the flight for their lives to Egypt, when Herod slew all the male children under two years old. And all of this because God chose a most extreme method for manifesting His purpose to the world and bringing about man’s just redemption.

Jesus, Himself, proved to be an extremist. Even His own family thought so. He was far out on the limb when in His own home town He quoted Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah (Isa. 61:12) then said, “Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). To announce Himself as their Messiah was indeed a rash and extreme action. It got our Lord nowhere except thrown out.

Again when the Jews questioned Him as to His origin and purpose, He took the view that their question ought to be met head-on. "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He will." Then, as if this were not extreme enough, He explained it more fully, not to moderate it but to make it even more radical: "Marvel not at this; for the hour comes in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). According to modern ecumenical protocol Jesus should never have taken such an extreme position in discussing theology with the Jews, especially since they were even then seeking grounds upon which to kill him.

If this seemed extreme, we wonder what we would call His statement in John 8:44 where He said to these same people, "You are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father it is your will to do..."

But are we, the finite and erring children, supposed to venture with such boldness into the din of battle and take these extreme views? Mainstream religion of our days says, no. I say, YES. I believe this is exactly what Jesus meant when He said that His follower should "take up his cross daily and follow me." This is what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:21-23 – "For hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps who did no sin... but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously, who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree..." What does Peter mean but that we are to follow in the steps of Jesus even to the point of death, if our commitment to God demands it?

This is where modern religion sharply parts company with the Christian faith of the Bible. The purpose of God is one of absolute and certain truths. But our age doesn't accept absolutes. It says, "How do we know?" "Who can be sure?" "Don't be dogmatic." "Wait until all the evidence is in." (Which is the same as saying that the Bible is unreliable evidence.) "Nobody knows for sure." "The only thing we can know is that we do not know." The new religion says that we cannot accept absolute truths because there are none. They do not realize that in making the statements, "we cannot" and "there are none" that they are making absolute statements in the attempt to deny that absolute facts exist! What extremes!

Christmas is the most extreme holiday of the year. The fabulous parties, reckless spending, extravagant decorations and almost violent effort at becoming carefree and happy are all extremes to which the world turns in order to bring about an appearance and feeling of joy. Angels are depicted, but few really believe in angels. Mary and Joseph are portrayed, but the fact of a virgin birth is questioned or flatly denied. The baby Jesus is pictured, but the actual entrance of God into the stream of human life is left for mystics to ponder, and not to be confused with regular living. The cross is displayed, but it is made of plastic, and un-bloody, with no hint of death or judgment, which is the real meaning. Every effort is made to avoid the extremes of God; the violent entrance of life into the world through a virgin so that Jesus would be both God and Man; the purpose of His coming, to accept the horrible guilt of sin and undergo sin's final punishment, death; the

fact of His perpetual presence through the power of the Holy Spirit; the unprecedented event of His return to confront every human being and to grant them immortality or eternal death. These vital facts are too extreme for the modern man who mellows in the middle of the road and finds his Christmas joy in the activities of family, gatherings, festive dinners and tinsel lights, rather than in the truths which these things are supposed to celebrate.

The objection to extremes does not originate in the Bible nor in Christian doctrine. Christianity was first proclaimed as that which would mark men for persecution and slander. This was part of the price Christ said one just pay. No half-hearted repentance, no half-way conversion and half-truth confession is acceptable according to Jesus. The rich young ruler was to sell all. Nicodemus was to undergo a completely new birth. The temple had to be rid of the money, the money-changers and even the livestock. What an extremist Jesus turned out to be. (Is there a moderate way to get crucified?)

Paul followed in His steps. He held to only one gospel and defined it in precise terms. The apostles lived in a less complicated day, and with even fewer foes to fight. Certainly the agnostics of that day were not so radical and formidable as today's well-organized forces of Satan. Yet Paul found that it was no time for moderation in dealing with them. His statements were clean-cut and pointed. How can one be more extreme than to say, "Though we or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema"?

It was "extreme" of God to start the whole thing in the first place. "Let us make man in our own image", He said. Today's religion would moderate this purpose, would change God's plan to a more easily obtainable goal. But God's purpose does not change. If we want life, we must take it on His terms, since He is the only giver of life we know. God deals in extreme ends: life or death. The ends are obtained by extreme measure: Christ's death and resurrection to give life, or the final judgment producing death. If we want to be aligned with God, we may have to bear the stigma of "extremists", and take the extreme road to the eternal goal, because our God is an extremist. It is summed up in the words of John, the "apostle of love": "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Here are the two extremes. On which extreme are you?

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