

It's Not Extreme To Know What Is Right!

By Philip E. Busby

In our world today, we see and hear a lot about extremism; and the definition has always been problematic for humans who believe in freedom. Where does the freedom to express one's thoughts crossover into extremism? The answer to this is really not as hard as some people think, but people and government entities seem to be getting it wrong more and more. In the fear of being labeled some kind of extremist, people are backing down on their convictions, with the hope we can all just get along. Today, there is a growing separation between those who are willing to stand up for what they believe in, and those who believe if we all just go along with ideas which, at the very least, seem to be for the common good, we will find a world of peace. However, peace is not the result!

In the end, the result is that those willing to be extreme win. This is not because extremists overcome those who will do nothing in battle; but over time, the extremists are the ones who hold all the places of authority and power. This is what happens when opposition to differing ideas gets villainized. Once this is the case, we find it's the extremist's ideas and thoughts which people are eventually taught and coerced into accepting. The irony is, because all extremists do not agree, you may find that not being willing to stand up for your own convictions will lead to you being forced to stand up and fight for convictions and ideas which you do not or did not hold. The most important aspect to all this is that even if cooperating for the sake of cooperation does seem to bring a certain amount of peace, common good is not necessarily righteousness.

The most basic differences between extremism and the freedom to express and even teach practices which differ from others or the political correct norm, is that of force and/or pressure. We must be clear on this simple point, or there begins to be a lot of feelings, even in free countries, that the teaching or holding of certain beliefs are wrong simply because they exist and are available. This steps on the very toes of freedom! People should be free to believe what they want and to share those ideas with others. Why, you may ask? Well, first of all, it should come as no surprise to any human that all humans don't hold the same values or beliefs they hold. This idea that people are always being "offended" by the fact someone else presents or even holds a differing view is preposterous. However, it seems more and more, people want to define wrong as simply being in opposition to the "norm," or what people in certain positions believe.

The simple question is, who gets to define what is right and what is wrong? The Bible tells us, in this world, human governments exist which God allows to set laws over men; (Rom. 13:1-8) but that does not mean these authorities or powers are perfect. In the personal lives of each individual, every person must choose what he or she believes is right, and by what standards they are going to live their lives. (Rom. 14:1-8) Of course, the main reason government is not perfect is because individuals are imperfect. The point is, we will not stand before God as a nation or group, but we will stand before God as individuals! This is why government entities should believe in freedom, while still punishing true extremism. As an individual, it's not enough to simply follow any man or man-made institution; and no one should be forcing others into doing so. We should not be so easily offended by the fact others hold different ideas, and we should stand against the ideology that everyone must believe the same. This does not mean we believe freedom is righteousness; it's that freedom which allows individuals to seek righteousness, and righteous individuals to share what they have learned.

I believe choosing when to obey and when to stand up will be some of the most important decisions believers of this generation will make. God is ultimately the One Who decides what is right and what is wrong, and He is perfect; which of course means, He will judge us in perfection. However, while here on this earth, man, not being perfect, will not always make right judgments. So what is an individual to do? It may seem like a paradox to some people that the Bible tells us to obey them that have the rule over us, but that it's equally true we will be held accountable for all our personal choices which may cause us to stand in defiance when they tell us to do something wrong. However, what the Bible is telling us is not that we should simply do everything a government authority tells us to, but that we should not resist their authority simply because they exist. Being in opposition to the "norm" is not always right, any more than always being in compliance with the "norm" is. The answer to our question is that we must look at the true golden rule, which is to love the Lord our God with everything we are; and the second which is like unto the first, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:36-40) We offer the righteousness of God's Word to this world, through our actions and our voices. We are not here to force or attempt to trick others into making a confession of faith - that would be extremism - but we are also not here to simply sit in silence. When the authority tells us we must do or not do some-

thing we know is against God's direction, we must put God's law above man's! This has the chance to affect the governing authority to do the right thing, just as it did in Daniel's day. Daniel prayed to God three times a day in spite of the fact the law said he couldn't. For this, he was thrown in a den of lions. God chose to save Daniel; and the king not only turned the law completely around to say everyone should pray to The One True God; but he threw those men who had the idea of outlawing prayer, into the lions den. (Dan. 6)

This is why we must be persuaded in our own mind that what we are standing for is right. We cannot afford to take our knowledge of righteousness lightly. We may have to make an individual decision to stand up for righteousness, and we can't make our choices with the idea God will always save us as He did Daniel in the lions' den. If we choose to do something the ordained authority says is worthy of punishment, we need to have the knowledge of righteousness for ourselves. Many an individual has shed blood for the sake of righteousness, and we must make our choices with the knowledge that our reward is not on this earth, even if God does choose to deliver us. (Rev. 6:9-11) This is not a crazy or extreme ideology; it's exactly what Jesus did.

Man has often had trouble dealing with the fact we can only follow God by having a personal relationship with Him, but it's the foundation of what we are talking about! We can't claim to follow God and be in the right simply because we do or don't do what someone else tells us. We can't just blindly follow another man or group, even if that man or group claims to be of God. The definition of a theocracy is a government which is said to be led directly by a deity. This is mostly done by having a leader who is believed to be getting their direction straight from a higher authority, such as a god or even be a god incarnate themselves. This automatically puts what the leader or government in general chooses to dictate, outside the arena of individual debate. When one tries to challenge even a singular idea or edict the leader has laid out, it immediately becomes not about the issue, but about questioning the legitimacy of the leader's link to the higher source. This is not really different from the way many cults are ran. Often, there is a leader who has some supposed link to God or a god of some sort, which makes what they say special and unchallengeable. Some of these cults only survive for a limited time and then fall apart; but at other times, they last for years, if not centuries, even after the death of that special someone. In either case, what the leader says goes, or you are defying the direct order of god. That's pretty heavy stuff, and in almost all places where this has been or is practiced, there is a significant abuse of power, and the creation of extremism.

Unfortunately, many churches are vulnerable to the same troubles which a cult or theocracy are, and commonly turn into, because the very same ideas created their premise! Often there is a man who has ideas or preaches a certain "way," and those ideas are considered direct revelations from God. People often follow them, not because they have learned something for themselves, but because they believe there is merit in simply following that man and his teachings. In many cases, the only difference between what people consider a cult and what they consider a legitimate church or denomination, has to do with how much the original person(s) who laid out the teaching considered themselves to be an undeniable authority, and/or how "extreme" they feel the group is in its teaching. However, whether the person who originally taught, demanded anything or taught something extreme in any form, the result is the same. People are often following the original ideas and teachings without question, instead of gaining a deep personal understanding for themselves. Thus, people are also easily taught to follow the teachings of later leaders of the group, just because they are who they are and/or hold the position they hold. In the end, this can bode very badly for everyone.

Many would even make the argument that this is Biblical and point to the way Israel was formed as an example. However, this argument is, in actuality, an example of how much damage, people blindly following people, has done. The only reason to think Israel was formed by people blindly following a man and his teachings, is that many do not look at the details of the story for themselves. Instead, they are only looking at the overview or impression they have about what happened. Moses was no doubt a leader who was being directed straight from God Himself. However, it was not Moses who forced the people to follow, or who desired to even stand in the place of mediator between God and the people. When God called Moses, He was calling a man of great humility. Many people interpret Moses' talk with God at the burning bush as being one of distrust; and while this may seem to be the case in the eyes of man, it could not be the case of Moses' heart, which God could see. (I Sam. 16:7) Moses was standing on holy ground upon which he could not even wear his shoes. Before him was a bush which burned with the presence of God. (Ex. 3:1-4:17) There is no way Moses could have been of a defiant mind, an argumentative nature, or even a doubting spirit in regard to the power of God. If he had been, he would never have been seen again. (Lev. 10:1-2) What Moses was seriously questioning was himself and his individual ability. We should never question God, but we should always question ourselves. This is what working out our salvation with fear and trembling is all about. (Phil. 2:12-15) Realizing we have serious shortcomings, which God desires to develop

into solid abilities, is a first step in allowing God to grow that part of our lives. (Gal. 6:3) God wanted to assure Moses that the seeds of ability were already in him, even if he could not see them. God even sent Moses' brother (Aaron) to go with him as an arm to lean on - so to speak - but if you read the story, you find Moses needed him very little for the task which Moses thought he couldn't do!

When Moses came to the children of Israel, he did not take over by force, or even attempt to win them over by political maneuvers. Moses, much like a prophet, simply delivered God's message to the people. It would be up to the individual families and each person to listen and even take part. This is why God delivered the people in the way He did. God was not just humbling Egypt with the plagues; He was proving to Israel that He could do anything and He was truly in control, not Pharaoh or Moses. In the last plague, God would give the instructions for Moses to give to the people, about how to survive the passing over of the death angel. (Ex. 12:1-13) Moses did not ask for a vote, but he also did not go forth with a sword or army by his side. Moses gave the instructions; and again, it was up to the people as individuals to believe or not believe what Moses said. It was up to the people to follow the instructions or choose not to bother, in spite of whatever they believed. Had they been paying attention? Had they been reaching out and attempting to have a relationship with God for themselves? It was very important they be convinced that what Moses was telling them was not something Moses came up with, but it was the truth. Why? Because in the end, the reality in the home of each person was, where the blood was not found on the door posts and header, death was found the next morning!

After the children of Israel had been freed from Egypt, they came to mount Sinai where God was going to give them the instructions for how to form their nation. God did not ask Moses to go and tell the people all the law. God told Moses to instruct the people to come to the mount and hear God for themselves. Once they did, they were very afraid. God had gone through the Ten Commandments, and that was all the people wanted. They clearly understood God was speaking to them, but what they requested was that Moses go to speak with God instead, and everything God told Moses they would follow. This was not God's first intent, nor was it Moses' choice. This was the choice of the people, based on the fact they were afraid they could not continue standing before such a direct presence of God and live. (Ex. 19:1-20:26)

Another important point to keep in mind when considering the way God established Israel, is the fact it was not until the people insisted on it, many years after the death of leaders such as Moses and Joshua, that God allowed

Israel to have a king. (I Sam. 8) Most men in authority desire their power, and they often get away with it, not because there is no one big enough to stop them, but because, in many ways, it's the majority's desire to take the easy route of just being led. This is the very reason why when God's own Son came to this earth as a humble baby born into a humble family, He was eventually crucified on a tree. Pilot did not just crucify Jesus because the religious leaders brought Him. Pilot asked who the people would rather have released to them: A man in prison for sedition and murder, or the humble Jesus who had healed their bodies, even on the Sabbath day. (Matt. 27:15-26) Many of the people who called out that day and flooded that courtyard with calls to release Barabbas, did so simply because they were told by the religious authority of the day, that is what they were supposed to do. In an example of how power is often shared more than people realize, Pilot had only asked because he did not have the guts to use his authority and release Jesus as the innocent man He was. We can't be like this if we want to be saved from this world and all its sorrow. We must seek to be righteous and to know the truth for ourselves. Then we must stand up for righteousness, even if that puts our voice in opposition to the government, religious authorities and/or only in sync with a very small minority - maybe no one else at all!

Now, more than ever before, we live in a world where not just one country, one area, nor one region is suffering from the abuse of power by those in authority. The time has come for people to know what they believe, and be ready every day to live their lives according to what is right before God. As Jesus walked this earth, He chose twelve men to specifically disciple. These men were ultimately given authority to teach the Word, but that Word was/is just what Moses was given: and that is to follow God in a personal way. (Ex. 29:45-46, Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16) This is why the Bible tells us God gave "gifts" unto men in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, preachers, and teachers. (Eph. 4:8-16) Just as Jesus worked in humility, so too, these men are to work in humility. They carry the authority to teach God's Word if they are truly called of Him, but they are not your mediator. The fact man desires a mediator is why God sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth and allowed Him to die by the sword which the government bears. Just think about it, through His shed blood, God Himself became the Mediator between man and God! If that doesn't tell us something about how much God desires not some religious experience for those who believe in Him, but a true in-depth personal relationship, I don't know what does!