

Run Not Before The Lord

What the Bible and the SOP say about Extremism

By Brian Onang'o. November 18, 2016

In the hope of impressing vividly upon the minds of the Corinthian believers the importance of firm self-control, strict temperance, and unflagging zeal in the service of Christ, Paul in his letter to them made a striking comparison between the Christian warfare and the celebrated foot races held at stated intervals near Corinth. In these contests great risks were run. Some never recovered from the terrible physical strain. It was not unusual for men to fall on the course, bleeding at the mouth and nose, and sometimes a contestant would drop dead when about to seize the prize. But the possibility of lifelong injury or of death was not looked upon as too great a risk to run for the sake of the honor awarded the successful contestant. But such is not the case in the Christian warfare. *"The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."* Eccl 9:11. *"The weakest saint, as well as the strongest, may wear the crown of immortal glory."* There are, however, many sincere extremists who have throughout the history of the church sought to please God by doing much more than He required of them. They have run ahead of the LORD. They remain in the church today, and many sincere Christians risk following their imprudent teachings. We also run the risk of going the same way, for "there is in human nature a tendency to run to extremes and from one extreme to another entirely opposite. Many are fanatics. They are consumed by a fiery zeal which is mistaken for religion, but character is the true test of discipleship." {5T 305.4} For this cause, we here shed some light on the counsels given by God in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy on this subject. It's our prayer that this will be a blessing to you. (see AA 309-321).

Extremism, Fanaticism and Enthusiasm- Every reform movement since New Testament times has

had to contend with extremists. Their message may contain truth, but their timing, methods, and ensuing consequences do much to weaken the impact of their message. At a New York conference in 1868 Ellen White wrote that some who were health reform advocates "were extremists, and would run the health reform into the ground.... Their influence would disgust believers and unbelievers." {MOL 306.2} She also wrote about some who were "were becoming discouraged, and some were backsliding upon the health reform, fearing that at Battle Creek they were radical and fanatical." There is a thin line between extremism and fanaticism, but the baleful work of both extremists and fanatics has the same fearful effects. Little attempt is here made to distinguish between these two groups.

The dictionary defines extremism as the the holding of extreme political or religious views, fanaticism as being affected by excessive enthusiasm, particularly on religious subjects, indulging wild and extravagant notions of religion or being filled with excessive and single-minded zeal and enthusiasm as religious fervour supposedly resulting directly from divine inspiration, typically involving speaking in tongues and wild, uncoordinated movements of the body. An enthusiast imagines he has special or supernatural converse with God, or special communications from him.

In the context of the Bible a few cases can help our understanding. We consider the stories of Uzzah, the healed leper and Paul. The case of Uzzah is that of a man that tried, presumptuously, to do more than God required of him.

"Through Moses the Lord had given special instruction concerning the transportation of the ark. None but the priests, the descendants of Aaron,

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

were to touch it, or even to look upon it uncovered. The divine direction was, "The sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." Numbers 4:15. The priests were to cover the ark, and then the Kohathites must lift it by the staves, which were placed in rings upon each side of the ark and were never removed. But of Uzzah it is written that "when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." 2 Samuel 6:6-7.

"Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" Job 4:17 This case of defying divine instruction for good, of man trying to be more just than God is repeated by the leper who was healed by Jesus. Jesus then "straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." Mark 1:43-44. Notwithstanding the caution of Jesus, the man made no further effort to conceal the fact of his cure. It would indeed have been impossible to conceal it, but the leper "went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter." Mark 1:45 His act in blazing abroad the matter resulted in hindering the Saviour's work. It caused the people to flock to Him in such multitudes that He was forced for a time to cease His labors. (See DA DA 2642-265)

The apostle Paul was also sometime, before his conversion, an extremist having misguided zeal. The Jews had this same zeal without knowledge, of which he wrote, "Brethren, my heart's desire and

prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Romans 10:1-2.

Jesus also said that "the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." John 16:2 There is in these cases a mix of misguided zeal, presumption, imprudence and even deception.

These statements from the Spirit of Prophecy also give a glimpse of what they understood by extremism and fanaticism:

Misguided zeal - The manifestation of God's renewing grace on sinful men causes angels to rejoice, but often this work has, through unbelief, been termed fanaticism, and the messenger through whom God has worked has been spoken of as having zeal that is not according to knowledge. {GW 170.3}

Great Extremes - As the end draws near, the enemy will work with all his power to bring in fanaticism among us. He would rejoice to see Seventh-day Adventists going to such extremes that they would be branded by the world as a body of fanatics. {GW 316.1}

Wave of excitement - In 1844 we had to meet fanaticism on every hand, but always the word came to me: "A great wave of excitement is an injury to the work. Keep your feet in the footprints of Christ." Under great excitement, strange work is done. {GW 316.2}

The Principle of Moderation in the Bible

King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had early taught about the principle of moderation when he wrote "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Ecc 7:16.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

Wise counsel also to the youth is that while they should seek a happy and cheerful attitude; joys that will make life worthwhile, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:", they are not invited to excesses "for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Ecc 11:9

The principle of moderation will help to avoid extremes in all things and its baleful results, "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." Proverbs 25:16

The bible teaches that a christian should avoid both extremes. "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." Phil 4:5 "You need not go into the water, or into the fire, but take the middle road, avoiding all extremes." {CD 211.4}

Four Points of Difficulty

When the Bible disallows extremism, it doesn't give a license for christians to be slothful, careless and indifferent. They must still "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" Phil 2:12. "For I say unto you", Jesus said, "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt 5:20. The paradox here introduced gives a point of difficulty that can only be solved by avoiding both extremes. Three other difficulties are introduced. There is the danger of being led by Satan to call genuine revivals fanaticism, that of using as an excuse the reproofs against fanaticism to remain behind and fail to do known duty and that of having a mere observance of forms; cold formalism, and that of having an unwarranted fear of fanaticism.

Formalism and extremism—When the enemy sees that the Lord is blessing His people, and preparing

them to discern his delusions, he will work with his masterly power to bring in fanaticism on one hand and cold formalism on the other, that he may gather in a harvest of souls. {ChS 40.1} Careful management on all points is needed, so that we shall neither run into the fire of fanaticism nor drift into formalism, which will freeze our own souls and the souls of others. {RH, February 12, 1901 par. 18}

Calling Good Evil – Satan is constantly seeking to deceive men and lead them to call sin righteousness, and righteousness sin. How successful has been his work! {GC 192.3} But "what if the sincere worker for God should be called a fanatic? This is the name that those who have been truly devoted to God have ever been called upon to bear." {RH, March 14, 1893 par. 13} Satan has always led men to call the work of God fanaticism. Noah, John the Baptist, Lot, William Miller and Ellen White were all labeled fanatics. (CC 33.7, DA 275.5, LDE 232.4, CTr 336.2, RH, January 26, 1897 par. 6)

When the Lord works through human instrumentalities, when men are moved with power from on high, Satan leads his agents to cry, "Fanaticism!" and to warn people not to go to extremes. Let all be careful how they raise this cry; for though there is counterfeit coin, this does not lower the value of that which is genuine. Because there are spurious revivals and spurious conversions, it does not follow that all revivals are to be held in suspicion. Let us not show the contempt manifested by the Pharisees when they said, "This man receiveth sinners." Luke 15:2 {GW 170.2}

God's servants must arm themselves with the mind of Christ. They must not expect to escape insult and misjudgment. They will be called enthusiasts and fanatics. {OFC 267.4} When we reach the standard that the Lord would have us reach, worldlings will regard Seventh-day Adventists as odd, singular,

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

straight-laced extremists. {RH, January 9, 1894 par. 10}

Should the Lord work upon people as He did on and after the day of Pentecost, many who now claim to believe the truth would know so very little of the operation of the Holy Spirit that they would cry, "Beware of fanaticism." Faith that calls upon God to relieve human suffering, faith that God has enjoined upon His people to exercise, is called fanaticism. {CTr 371.4, TM 80.1}

We must be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in pronouncing the ministration of His Holy Spirit a species of fanaticism. {ISM 130.1}

Extremism and Lukewarmness - While Satan tempts the many to be too slow, he always tempts extremists to be too fast.

Two classes have been presented before me: first, those who are not living up to the light which God has given them; secondly, those who are too rigid in carrying out their one-sided ideas of reform, and enforcing them on others. When they take a position, they stand to it stubbornly, and carry nearly everything over the mark. {CD 196.1}

"Here is the difficulty:", James White wrote concerning Ellen White's work in dealing with extremism, "What she may say to urge the tardy, is taken by the prompt to urge them over the mark. And what she may say to caution the prompt, zealous, incautious ones, is taken by the tardy as an excuse to remain too far behind." {RH, March 17, 1868.}

Satan's object is accomplished just as surely when men run ahead of Christ and do the work He has never entrusted to their hand, as when they remain in the Laodicean state, lukewarm, feeling rich and increased with goods, and in need of

nothing. The two classes are equally stumbling blocks. {ISM 180.4}

Unwarranted fear of Fanaticism - There are many who have heard the message for this time and have seen its results, and they cannot but acknowledge that the work is good, but from fear that some will take extreme positions, and that fanaticism may arise in our ranks, they have permitted their imagination to create many obstacles to hinder the advance of the work, and they have presented these difficulties to others, expatiating on the dangers of accepting the doctrine. They have sought to counteract the influence of the message of truth. Suppose they should succeed in these efforts, what would be the result?--the message to arouse a lukewarm church should cease, and the testimony exalting the righteousness of Christ would be silenced. {11MR 294.1}

The perfect example of Christ

"In connection with this work[medical missionary work] we see so much which dishonors God. In all its bearings it is to be in conformity with Christ's work. Those who are workers together with God will just as surely represent the character of Christ as Christ represented the character of His Father while in this world." {CME 8.1}

Those who are close students of the Word, following Christ in humility of soul, will not go to extremes. The Saviour never went to extremes, never lost self-control, never violated the laws of good taste. He knew when to speak and when to keep silent. He was always self-possessed. He never erred in His judgment of men or of truth. He was never deceived by appearances. He never raised a question that was not clearly appropriate, never gave an answer that was not right to the point. He silenced the voice of the caviling priests by penetrating beneath the surface and reaching the heart, flashing light into the mind and awakening the conscience. Those who follow the example of

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

Christ will not be extremists. They will cultivate calmness and self-possession. The peace that was seen in the life of Christ will be seen in their lives. {GW 317.2-3}

All that seek to labour with Christ have Him for a perfect pattern. Everything that offends and dishonours God will not be if the method of Christ is followed in ministry. And now *“where are the men who will work and study and agonize in prayer as did Christ?”*

God's dealing with man

The word of God reveals His character, that *“God is love”*. He is *“the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”* (1 John 4:8, Exodus 34:6-7). He *“is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* 2 Peter 3:18.

“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Psalms 119:130 For man's sake God sends truth, to enlighten. And that truth is able to save *“to make one wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* How important that we should all seek this truth. The truth is neither sent to condemn nor to discourage nor to harm, but to enlighten. *“The Lord sends warnings to His people, not to destroy them, but to correct their errors”*. {2SM 71.3}

The messages from God may come through His angles, revelation, providence, nature or through men. But *“when the Lord gives a man a message, He gives with it something whereby His people may know that the message is from Him. God does not ask his people to believe everyone who comes to them with a message.”* {2SM 71.2}

The truth from God is not sent as a flood. But in His patience, *“God dispenses wisdom as fast as men and women can appreciate it, especially after they have obeyed known duty.”* {MOL 304.4}

“I have yet many things to say unto you,” said Jesus, *“but ye cannot bear them now.”* John 16:12 Jesus knew how to lead along the minds of His disciples. The Lord also knew how to introduce to His waiting people the great subject of health reform, step by step, as they could bear it, and make a good use of it, without souring the public mind. {CD 495.4}

We (also) must lead the people along patiently and gradually, remembering the hole of the pit whence we were digged that we may *“bring forth fruit with patience”*. Luke 8: 15 {CH 438.3} We must meet the people where they are. {CH 245.3} None must forget that *“he was purged from his old sins.”* 2 Peter 1:9

We must allow others *“as much time as we have required”* to reach our present understanding. And we must not *“advocate positions”* that are not put to *“a practical test”* in our own homes. For this is dissimulation, a species of hypocrisy. {MOL 305.7-8}

Satan Developing Extremism

Satan has throughout the ages brought in fanaticism to counter the working of the Holy Spirit. And even as the end approaches, the same will be repeated. *“I have long known that fanaticism will be manifest again, in different ways.”* {2SM 44.1} As the end draws near, the enemy will work with all his power to bring in fanaticism among us. {1MCP 46.2} We are living in a time when every phase of fanaticism will press its way in among believers and unbelievers. Satan will come in, speaking lies in hypocrisy. Everything that he can invent to deceive men and women will be brought forward. {1MCP 38.1} Fanaticism will appear in the very midst of us. Deceptions will

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” John 7:17

come, and of such a character that if it were possible they would mislead the very elect. {2SM 16.4} The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this (sadly) is called the moving of the Holy Spirit. {21MR 128.5}

We shall here consider one case of fanaticism and extremism: how it developed and its effects- at Luther's time during the reformation.

The progress of Reform in Germany

During the reformation, as reforms were taking place in Germany, "Satan was not idle. He now attempted what he has attempted in every other reformatory movement—to deceive and destroy the people by palming off upon them a counterfeit in place of the true work." {GC 186.1}

Fanatical Excitement – The fanaticism in Germany began with the excitement in the religious world which created a fanatical excitement in "a few men", who "deeply affected by the excitement in the religious world, imagined themselves to have received special revelations from Heaven" {GC 186.2} In turn, "the proceedings of these enthusiasts created no little excitement." {GC 186.3} And this excitement created further excitement at a later time. Indeed "fanaticism, once started and left unchecked, is as hard to quench as a fire which has obtained hold of a building." {1MCP 43.1}

Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. {1T 412.1 } When men set

1854 as the time of the second advent, considerable excitement was created by the 1854 time. {1T 409.1}

Even now there are "restless minds who want to be seeing and believing something new continually are constantly rising, some in one place and some in another, all doing a special work for the enemy, yet claiming to have the truth." {1T 417.3}

Some zealous ones who are aiming and straining every energy for originality have made a grave mistake in trying to get something startling, wonderful, entrancing before the people, something that they think others do not comprehend; but they do not themselves know what they are talking about. They speculate upon God's Word, advancing ideas that are not a whit of help to themselves or to the churches. For the time being they may excite the imagination, but there is a reaction, and these very ideas become a hindrance. Faith is confounded with fancy, and their views may bias the mind in a wrong direction. {1SM 180.5}

Fanatics are still seeking something exciting, "something startling, wonderful, entrancing before the people". But "how important that the cause of truth be stripped of everything like a false and fanatical excitement, that the truth may stand upon its own merits, revealing its native purity and exalted character." {1T 414.2}

The ministers should not feel that they have some wonderful advanced ideas, and unless all receive these, they will be shaken out and a people will arise to go forward and upward to the victory. Some of those who are resisting the very principles of the message God has sent for this time, present just such cases as yourself. {1SM 180.3}

Hypocrisy - Thomas Munzer was the most active of the fanatics in Germany. He was possessed with a desire of reforming the world, and forgot, as all

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

enthusiasts do, that the reformation should begin with himself. {GC 191.1} Above all things, we should not with our pens advocate positions that we do not put to a practical test in our own families, upon our own tables. This is dissimulation, a species of hypocrisy. If we come to persons who have not been enlightened in regard to health reform, and present our strongest positions at first, there is danger of their becoming discouraged as they see how much they have to give up, so that they will make no effort to reform. We must lead the people along patiently and gradually, remembering the hole of the pit whence we were digged. {3T 21.2}

Criticism – The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reproved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard. {CCh 240.3} Through the years several erroneous or subversive movements, based on misinterpretation of Scripture or supposed divine illumination, have arisen among Seventh-day Adventists. Usually closely linked with the supposed new light was a message of condemnation of the church and its leaders, and often there was some phase of time setting. It is noteworthy that fault-finding and self-confidence is a major step in the road to fanaticism. In Germany, “a few men, deeply affected by the excitement in the religious world, imagined themselves to have received special revelations from Heaven, and claimed to have been divinely commissioned to carry forward to its completion the Reformation which, they declared, had been but feebly begun by Luther.” {GC 186.2}

There are little companies continually rising who believe that God is only with the very few, the very scattered, and their influence is to tear down and scatter that which God's servants build up. Restless minds who want to be seeing and believing something new continually are constantly rising,

some in one place and some in another, all doing a special work for the enemy, yet claiming to have the truth. They stand separate from the people whom God is leading out and prospering, and through whom He is to do His great work. They are continually expressing their fears that the body of Sabbathkeepers are becoming like the world, but there are scarcely two of these whose views are in harmony. They are scattered and confused, and yet deceive themselves so much as to think that God is especially with them. Some of these profess to have the gifts among them; but are led by the influence and teachings of these gifts to hold in doubt those upon whom God has laid the special burden of His work, and to lead off a class from the body. The people, who, in accordance with God's word, are putting forth every effort to be one, who are established in the message of the third angel, are looked upon with suspicion for the reason that they are extending their labor and are gathering souls into the truth. They are considered worldly because they have an influence in the world, and their acts testify that they expect God yet to do a special and great work upon the earth, to bring out a people and fit them for Christ's appearing. {1T 417.3}

To Mr. Garmire, one such critic, [he had accused the church, saying the leaders would fall through self-exaltation (*see 2SM 64.3*)] was written, “Satan has succeeded in making you think that you are selected by God to act a special part as a representative man in connection with the third angel's message, as it goes forth with power. But you are not right with God, and God cannot administer to error. You make the most of the errors you see in the responsible men of the church, and make capital of the reproofs given them, because these men do not harmonize with you, or regard as correct the religious experience which you hold as superior to the light God has let shine upon the church. Who placed you on the judgment seat, to condemn others?—Not God, but yourself.” {2SM 84.1 }

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” John 7:17

I saw that the minds of some of the church have not run in the right channel. There have been some peculiar temperaments that have had their notions by which to measure their brethren. And if any did not exactly agree with them, there was trouble in the camp at once. Some have strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. I saw that some are withering spiritually. They have lived some time watching to keep their brethren straight watching for every fault to make trouble with them. And while doing this, their minds are not on God, nor on heaven, nor on the truth; but just where Satan wants them—on someone else. Their souls are neglected; they seldom see or feel their own faults, for they have had enough to do to watch the faults of others without so much as looking to their own souls or searching their own hearts. A person's dress, bonnet, or apron takes their attention. They must talk to this one or that one, and it is sufficient to dwell upon for weeks. I saw that all the religion a few poor souls have consists in watching the garments and acts of others, and finding fault with them. *Unless they reform, there will be no place in heaven for them, for they would find fault with the Lord Himself.* Said the angel: "It is an individual work to be right with God." The work is between God and our own souls. But when persons have so much care of others' faults, they take no care of themselves. These notional, faultfinding ones would often cure themselves of the habit if they would go directly to the individual they think is wrong. It would be so crossing that they would give up their notions rather than go. But it is easy to let the tongue run freely about this one or that one when the accused is not present. {1T 144-145}

I saw that God is displeased with the disposition that some have to murmur against those who have fought the heaviest battles for them, and who endured so much in the beginning of the message, when the work went hard. The experienced

laborers,—those who toiled under the weight and the oppressive burdens when there were but few to help bear them,—God regards; and He has a jealous care for those who have proved faithful. He is displeased with those who are ready to find fault with and reproach the servants of God who have grown gray in building up the cause of present truth. Your reproaches and murmurings, young men, will surely stand against you in the day of God. {GW 318.2}

Notwithstanding all the evidences that God has been leading the body, there are, and will continue to be, those who profess the Sabbath, who will move independent of the body, and believe and act as they choose. {1T 420.1}

Running Ahead - There will always be false and fanatical movements made by persons in the church who claim to be led of God—those who will run before they are sent, and will give day and date for the occurrence of unfulfilled prophecy. The enemy is pleased to have them do this, for their successive failures and leading into false lines cause confusion and unbelief. {Letter 28, 1897}

Thomas Munze, the most active of the German fanatics claimed that he himself had been divinely commissioned to introduce the true reform. {GC 191.1} Such deception was witnessed about 1865. Concerning this, it is written, "I saw some things in relation to the perplexing and discouraging conditions of the cause in that state. I was shown that quite a number who were thinking it their duty to teach the word of God publicly had mistaken their work. They had no call to devote themselves to this solemn, responsible work. They were not qualified for the work of the ministry, for they could not instruct others properly." {2T 553.1}

Deception - One of these prophets (in the reformation) claimed to have been instructed by the angel Gabriel. {GC 186.3}

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

Impulse and Feelings - In the reformation, "The fanatical teachers gave themselves up to be governed by impressions, regarding every thought and impulse as the voice of God; consequently they went to great extremes." {GC 191.2}

Likewise also some regarded feelings in Ellen White's time are the voice of God, "You are inclined to fanatical sentiments on some things, and you regard your strong feelings as presentiments from the Lord, when He has nothing to do with it. Now, please stop walking in this unsanctified independence and self-confidence, for it will prove your ruin unless you see the evil and repent of it and submit to follow the way of the Lord." {20MR 119.4}

Leaving School - The fruit of the new teaching soon became apparent. The people were led to neglect the Bible or to cast it wholly aside. The schools were thrown into confusion. Students, spurning all restraint, abandoned their studies and withdrew from the university. The men who thought themselves competent to revive and control the work of the Reformation succeeded only in bringing it to the verge of ruin. {GC 187.3}

Confusion - Confusion was a sure result of the fanatical movement in Germany as it is the result of any such work today. Rather than bringing any good, it brings disorder. "From the professed friends of the Reformation had risen its worst enemies. The very truths which had brought him(Luther) so great joy and consolation were being employed to stir up strife and create confusion in the church." {GC 187.4} A student who united with him (a self-proclaimed prophet) forsook his studies, declaring that he had been endowed by God Himself with wisdom to expound His word. {GC 186.3}

Demoralizing people- "*Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have*

not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life" Ez 13:22

When extremism afflicts a movement, many within and without have their faith shaken. Insiders tend to wonder whether their cause is correct, while onlookers may be discouraged from taking any interest at all in the cause. In Germany, "the Reformers were astonished and perplexed. This was such an element as they had never before encountered, and they knew not what course to pursue. Said Melancthon: "There are indeed extraordinary spirits in these men; but what spirits? ... On the one hand, let us beware of quenching the Spirit of God, and on the other, of being led astray by the spirit of Satan." {GC 187.2}

Even now "many think that they are representing the justice of God while they wholly fail of representing His tenderness and His great love. Often the ones whom they meet with sternness and severity are under the stress of temptation. Satan is wrestling with these souls, and harsh, unsympathetic words discourage them and cause them to fall a prey to the tempter's power. {MH 163.2}

These one-idea men can see nothing except to press the one thing that presents itself to their minds. One fanatic, with his strong spirit and radical ideas, who will oppress the conscience of those who want to be right, will do great harm. The church needs to be purified from all such influences. {HS 212.1}

But "if the members of the church are not subject one to another, if they go here and there with a message God has not given them, the church will become demoralized, and fanaticism of the worst order will come in" {ST, June 2, 1890 par. 8}

But we ought to "strengthen the feeble hands". "Tell the people in clear, hopeful language how they may

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" John 7:17

escape the heritage of shame which is our deserved portion. But for Christ's sake do not present before them ideas that will discourage them, that will make the way to heaven seem very difficult. Keep all these overstrained ideas to yourself." {1SM 182.1}

Disunity - These persons had no love for union and harmony of action. They delighted in disorder. Confusion, distraction, and diversity of opinion were their choice. They were ungovernable, unsubdued, unregenerated, and unconsecrated, and this element of confusion suited their undisciplined minds. They were a curse to the cause of God and brought the name of Seventh-day Adventists into disrepute. {2T 553.2}

Avoid all appearance of evil – Another sure result of extremism is to disgust unbelievers and to give cause for the work of God to be reproached. “One manifestation of fanaticism among us will close many doors against the soundest principles of truth.” {Ev 611.3} “It is the desire and plan of Satan to bring in among us those who will go to great extremes,—people of narrow minds, who are critical and sharp, and very tenacious in holding their own conceptions of what the truth means. They will be exacting, and will seek to enforce rigorous duties, and go to great lengths in matters of minor importance, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law,—judgment and mercy and the love of God. Through the work of a few of this class of persons, the whole body of Sabbath-keepers will be designated as bigoted, Pharisaical, and fanatical. The work of the truth, because of these workers, will be thought to be unworthy of notice.” {RH, May 29, 1888 par. 6}

Though the work of such men in Germany, the cause was brought into disrepute. “The agony of soul which Luther had so long before experienced at Erfurt now pressed upon him with redoubled power as he saw the results of fanaticism charged

upon the Reformation. The papist princes declared—and many were ready to credit the statement—that the rebellion was the legitimate fruit of Luther's doctrines. Although this charge was without the slightest foundation, it could not but cause the Reformer great distress. That the cause of truth should be thus disgraced by being ranked with the basest fanaticism, seemed more than he could endure. {GC 192.1} This terrible condition had not resulted from the teachings of Luther; but throughout Germany his enemies were charging it upon him. They (the papists) blamed Luther, even for the errors which he had been most earnestly endeavoring to correct. Then they “regained their confidence and exclaimed exultingly: “One last struggle, and all will be ours.” {GC 187.3}

Satan will be willing a people who profess to be keeping the law of God should represent themselves before the world in words and deportment as fanatics, for this disgusts unbelievers; and they cast the truth and the fanaticism in the same scale and count it of the same value. {5MR 60.1}

Permanent Damage - I was shown that both B and C (extremists in health reform) have dishonored the cause of God. They have brought upon it a stain which will never be fully wiped out. {2T 384.1}

I was shown that these men were not reliable. They were extremists and would run the health reform into the ground. They were not pursuing a course which would tend to correct or reform those who were intemperate in their diet; but their influence would disgust believers and unbelievers, and would drive them further from reform, instead of bringing them nearer to it. {2T 377.1}

These extremists do more injury in a few months than they can undo in their whole lives. By them the entire theory of our faith is brought into disrepute, and they can never bring those who

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” John 7:17

witness such exhibitions of so-called health reform to think that there is anything good in it. These men are doing a work which Satan loves to see go on. {2T 377.2}

Here is Wisdom – With extremism, “you may reach a class of minds, but the more intelligent portion of the community will be driven further off by your labors.” {2T 555.1}

A certain class may be convinced by you of the truth; but more would be turned away and placed where they could not be reached by proper, judicious labor. Interwoven with your experience are things that will prove detrimental to the truth. God cannot accept you as a representative of the truth. {2T 557.1}

A warning - None should take a course to make themselves disgusting to unbelievers. {1T 413.1 }

By the world the Sabbath and their errors are placed upon a level and thrown away together. God is angry with those who pursue a course to make the world hate them. If a Christian is hated because of his good works and for following Christ, he will have a reward; but if he is hated because he does not take a course to be loved, hated because of his uncultivated manners and because he makes the truth a matter of quarrel with his neighbors, and takes a course to make the Sabbath as annoying as possible to them, he is a stumbling block to sinners, a reproach to the sacred truth, and unless he repents it were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he were cast into the sea. {1T 420.1}

Away with the Bible - Any manifestation of fanaticism takes the mind away from the evidence of truth--the Word itself. {2SM 42.6} It was so in Germany; it is so today. Then men manufacture man-made tests. “And when there were no real difficulties in the church, trials have been

manufactured. The minds of the church and the servants of the Lord are called from God, truth, and heaven to dwell upon darkness. Satan delights to have such things go on; it feasts him. But these are none of the trials which are to purify the church and that will in the end increase the strength of God's people.” {1T 144-145}

There is a conscientiousness that will carry everything to extremes, and make Christian duties as burdensome as the Jews made the observance of the Sabbath. The rebuke which Jesus gave to the scribes and Pharisees applies to this class as well: “Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God.” One fanatic, with his strong spirit and radical ideas, who will oppress the conscience of those who want to be right, will do great harm. The church needs to be purified from all such influences.” {HS 212.1}

From the light given me of the Lord, men will arise speaking perverse things. Yea, already they have been working and speaking things which God has never revealed, bringing sacred truth upon a level with common things. Issues have been and will continue to be made of men's conceited fallacies, not of truth. *The devisings of men's minds will invent tests that are no tests at all, that when the true test shall be made prominent, it shall be considered on a par with the man-made tests that have been of no value.* {2SM 14.3}

Undoing the effects of Extremism – It has already been said that the effects of extremism cannot completely be done away with even with earnest judicious labour. But to whatever extent it can be undone, we have an example in Luther on how to go about it. “With great caution and humility, yet with decision and firmness, he entered upon his work... Ascending the pulpit, he with great wisdom and gentleness instructed, exhorted, and reproved.” {GC 189.3}

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” John 7:17

Day after day, for a whole week, Luther continued to preach to eager crowds. The word of God broke the spell of fanatical excitement. The power of the gospel brought back the misguided people into the way of truth. {GC 190.2}

The Gospel Sieve – How can we avoid becoming fanatics? The counsel is to always carry along with you “the gospel sieve and sift everything you hear, that you may choose the good and refuse the bad” {1T 490} “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15 Those who are close students of the Word, following Christ in humility of soul, will not go to extremes. The Saviour never went to extremes, never lost self-control, never violated the laws of good taste. {GW 317.2} “I warn the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be careful how you receive every new notion and those who claim to have great light. The character of their work seems to be to accuse and to tear down.” {2SM 69.2}

The sincere desire to do others good will lead the Christian worker to put away all thought of bringing into the message of present truth any strange teachings leading men and women into fanaticism. {3SM 377.2} Teach these things in the simplest form, that the sin-darkened soul may see the light shining from the cross of Calvary. {1SM 178.4} Preach the Word in simplicity and all humility; present clear, unadulterated truth to the people. Open no door to fanatical movements, for the influence of these is to bring confusion of mind and discouragement and lack of faith to God’s people. {2SM 28.2}

If you would dwell on such subjects as Christ’s willingness to forgive sins, to receive the sinner, to save that which is lost, subjects that inspire hope and courage, you would be a blessing. But while you strive to be original and take such extreme views, and use such strong language in presenting them, there is danger of doing much harm. Some

may grasp your thought and seem to be benefited, but when tempted and overcome, they lose courage to fight the good fight of faith. {1SM 177.1}

Let both tares and wheat grow together until the harvest. Then it is the angels that do the work of separation. {2SM 69.1} Let the believers heed the voice of the angel who has said to the church, “Press together.” In unity is your strength. Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. God hath a church, and Christ hath declared, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” {2SM 69.4}

Solid faith will not lead anyone away into fanaticism or into acting the slothful servant. It is the bewitching power of Satan that leads men to look to themselves in the place of looking to Jesus. {FW 27.2}

Whoever wills to do His will shall know of the doctrine - Those who are under the influence of the Spirit of God will not be fanatical, but calm and steadfast, free from extravagance in thought, word, or deed. Amid the confusion of delusive doctrines, the Spirit of God will be a guide and a shield to those who have not resisted the evidences of truth. {FLB 56.5}

Further Reading

Your Bible

Extremism at Battle Creek (MOL)

Progress of Reform in Germany (GC)

Extremes in Diet (CD)

Extremes in Health Reform (2T)

Guarding New Members Against Fanaticism (Ev)

The Peril of Extreme Views (1 SM)

Fanciful or Speculative Teachings (2 SM)

Beautiful summary:

<http://thestraighttestimony.com/Fanatics.html>

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” John 7:17