THE CALL TO EXTREMES by Leslie Diestelkamp

Throughout the ages God has always challenged the people who would come near to Him to extraordinary circumstances. He has never been content with the usual, the moderate, the ordinary. His commands and His promises have usually been quite extreme indeed.

The command to Adam and Eve was extreme, especially when it is realized that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good to look upon and that all other fruit was acceptable. Why exclude that one tree alone? The requirement of Noah was certainly an extreme one, especially when we realize that he could have no conception of such flooding as it was foretold, and that he could also not possibly visualize the great structure he was to erect. The commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son was extraordinary, especially when we remember that this very son was the only son of Abraham and Sarah, that he was the son of their old age, and that he was the subject of promises for future generations, all of which depended, not upon his early death, but upon his life.

The extraordinary results of certain human action—results that were of obvious divine origin—were also significant. Uzzah’s immediate death because of his disobedience, Naaman’s immediate healing because of his obedience, and the instant punishment upon Nadab and Abihu all demonstrate the unconventional nature of God’s action—the extreme nature of His promises and His threats.

It is safe to say right here that God is never satisfied with the ordinary. In the following five ways at least, we see the nature of God’s demands that our religion be in the extreme—that it is to be extraordinary religion:

1. We must base our hope on such extremely unworldly things such as the virgin birth, the resurrection of the dead, the cleansing power of the blood of the cross, the precious gift of salvation by grace without human merit, the requirement that we walk by faith and not by sight, and the hope of the ultimate reward of a non-earthly, non-physical home in heaven.

2. We must obey such apparently unreasonable commands without asking “Why?” Anyone who can see through a barrel with both ends knocked out knows there is no power in water to wash away guilt in the soul; but God has chosen to make water baptism a rigid condition of pardon by His grace. The command to repent may be quite reasonable, for we can see merit in such human action that leads to reformation; but the command to be baptized seems extreme to many since it involves no human merit.

3. God demands that His followers give up so much. Jesus taught that if our eye offends us, “pluck it out.” He taught that if one finds a real treasure (salvation), he will “sell all he has” to secure it. And He taught that if one doesn’t love God more than relatives, he can’t please God.

4. Furthermore, we must follow Christ so very closely—extremely closely. If we put our hand to the plow and look back, we are not even fit for His kingdom. In other words, He doesn’t want followers who wish they had stayed in the world or who begrudge the sacrifices they make as His disciples. Those who follow Christ reluctantly might just as well not follow Him at all. Those who run the race lazily and those who fight the good fight carelessly don’t measure up to the extraordinary discipleship God demands.

5. Even with regard to the service we render, God requires extremes. Our worship must not be in formality, ceremony, and ritual, but in spirit and in truth. Our benevolence must not be simply in bestowing love upon those who love us and upon others who are altogether lovable, but it must be in extending real love to our enemies, to the unworthy, to those who are all together unlovely and even quite unlovable.

Yes, God has called us to extremes. There is nothing mediocre or commonplace in the things that separate God’s very own people from the people of the world. His commands are explicit and exacting. His promises are superlative—supreme in excellence.