

103889 - What is blameworthy extremism?

the question

What is the meaning of 'going to extremes' in Islam? Is it considered extremism if a woman covers her face or a man lets his beard grow? Is it extremism to adhere to the prophet's way and refuse every innovated matter in Islam? What is the implication of the fact that the prophet, peace be upon him, when given two options, would choose the easier one?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allaah.

Firstly:

The hadeeth which condemns extremism was narrated from 'Abd-Allaah ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Those who go to extremes are doomed." He said it three times.

Narrated by Muslim (2670).

The scholars have many explanations for what is meant by extremism and those who go to extremes, all of which are in harmony with one another and do not contradict one another. All of them may be summed up as meaning one thing; it boils down to overburdening oneself and being too strict in matters where strictness is inappropriate.

These meanings include the following:

1 - Going to extremes in worship, which leads to excessive hardship. Islam does not enjoy anything but that in which there is ease and tolerance. It forbids excessive strictness in religion. The forms of extremism that people have invented in religion and were listed by the scholars as

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being examples of extremism are virtually innumerable.

Al-Nawawi said in Sharh Muslim (16/220):

i.e., those who delve too deep and go to extremes, and overstep the limits in both word and deed.
End quote.

2 - Introducing innovations into religion, by forbidding that which Allaah did not forbid, and introducing forms of worship and commitments that did not exist at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo' al-Fataawa (10/620):

Monasticism and innovated forms of worship which were not prescribed by Allaah and His Messenger are akin to the cases where the mushrikeen and others forbade good things that Allaah has permitted, and examples of the extremism that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) criticized when he said: "Those who go to extremes are doomed" and "If the month were made longer for me, I would have continued to fast without a break so that those who delve too deep would give up their attitude", such as extreme hunger and thirst which harm the mind and body, and prevent one from doing obligatory or mustahabb actions that are better than that. The same applies to walking barefoot and naked, which harms a person and brings no benefit, as in the hadeeth about Abu Israa'eel who vowed to fast, and to stand always and never sit, and never seek shade, or speak. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Tell him to sit down, and seek shade, and speak, but let him complete his fast." Narrated by al-Bukhaari. This matter is broad in scope. End quote.

3 - Exaggerated and affected speech, by trying to select words which attract people's attention, with no meaning or benefit.

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Ibn Abi'l-Dunya narrated this hadeeth in his essay al-Gheebah wa'l-Nameemah (Backbiting and malicious gossip), in a chapter entitled Ma jaa' fi Dhamm al-Taqa''ur fi'l-Kalaam (p. 15), in which he narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "That which I fear the most for my ummah is every well spoken hypocrite"

It was also narrated by Ahmad in al-Musnad (1/22) and classed as hasan by the editors of al-Musnad.

He also narrated that 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The prattling of speech is the prattling of the shaytaan."

Ibn al-Atheer said in al-Nihaayah (5/164):

Those who go to extremes in speech are those who speak in an affected manner.

4 - Indulging in that which does not concern one, asking about that which is inappropriate, and delving too deeply into that which is of no benefit.

al-Khattaabi said:

The one who goes to extremes is the one who delves too deeply into a thing, and burdens himself with looking into it in the manner of ahl al-kalaam, who examined matters that do not concern them, who indulge in that which their minds cannot comprehend. End quote from 'Awn al-Ma'bood (12/235).

Ibn Rajab said in Jaami' al-'Uloom wa'l-Hukam (p. 285):

The one who goes to extremes is the one who delves too deeply and looks into that which does not concern him. Examining and asking too much about the ruling on something that is not mentioned among obligatory duties or haraam things may lead to thinking that it is haraam or it is

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obligatory, because of its similarity to some duties or prohibitions. Accepting pardon for it or refraining from asking too much about it is better. End quote.

Then Ibn Rajab (may Allaah have mercy on him) mentioned some examples of what we should refrain from asking too many details about with regard to matters of the unseen that are unknown and subtle fiqhi differences, and discussing things that rarely happen, and so on.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen said in Sharh Riyadh al-Saaliheen (1/416-418)

The same applies to being too strict in matters of worship, when a person is very strict in prayer, fasting and other things that Allaah makes easy for him. If he is too hard on himself with regard to that which Allaah has made easy for him, he is doomed.

Another example is what some sick people do - especially in Ramadaan - when Allaah has permitted them not to fast when they are sick, and they need to eat and drink, but they are hard on themselves and continue fasting. We also tell these people to apply the hadeeth to themselves: "Those who go to extremes are doomed."

That also includes what some students do who are focusing on issues that have to do with Tawheed. When they come across verses or ahaadeeth which speak of the attributes of the Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, you see them examining them closely and asking questions that they are not supposed to ask, which the early generations of the ummah, the Sahaabah and Taabi'een and imams of guidance who came after them did not have the habit of asking. So you see one of them examining matters which he is not obliged to examine as a sign of going to extremes or delving too deeply in these matters. We say to these people: If you are content with what the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) were content with, then stop that, but if you are not content with it, then may Allaah never make you content. Rest assured that you will fall into extremism and hardship and stress.

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That also includes what some seekers of knowledge do of inserting rational possibilities into the words of some texts. So you will see them say, "Such and such is possible, and such and such is possible" - until the text becomes very confusing and the benefit of the text is lost, and that is wrong. Follow the text as it appears to be and set aside these rational possibilities, because if we examine every text in the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and try to find all rational possibilities in its meaning, we will have no verse or hadeeth left that one may quote as evidence, and all interpretations may become possible for every text. These rational ideas may be illusions from the shaytaan that he instils in people's hearts in order to confuse their beliefs and faith - Allaah forbid.

Another example is what some people do who go to extremes with regard to wudoo', so you see them doing wudoo' three or four or five or six or seven times or more, when there is no need to do that. Similarly with regard to ghusl from janaabah, you see them exhausting themselves when they do ghusl, putting water in their ears and nostrils. All of that is included in the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "Those who go to extremes are doomed, those who go to extremes are doomed, those who go to extremes are doomed."

Everyone who is too harsh on himself with regard to something that Allaah has made broad in scope [?] is included in this hadeeth. End quote.

Secondly:

With regard to adhering to outward signs of religious commitment and observing the sacred limits of Allaah, and obeying His commands, these are obligations of Islam, and the way to enter the Paradise of the Lord of the Worlds, and no one regards them as going to extremes except one who wants to free himself from the rules of sharee'ah and attack the established rulings. The blameworthy kind of going to extremes is that which goes beyond the laws and etiquette of sharee'ah. How can adhering to it and following it and clinging tightly to it be going to extremes??

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The decisive factor with regard to that is the evidence from the Qur'aan and Sunnah. That for which there is saheeh evidence which clearly shows that something is obligatory – such as covering the face and letting the beard grow – or that something is forbidden – such as the prohibition on musical instruments and mixing with women and so on – it is not permissible to describe it as going to extremes or harshness, because that implies accusing the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) – who enjoined us to do it – of going to extremes. God forbid that he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) should be like that.

As for that concerning which there is no text, and is one of the four aspects of extremism mentioned above, then this is what should be criticized and avoided, and should not be confused with the proven, clear rulings of Islam.

Thirdly:

With regard to the hadeeth of 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), in which she said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was never given the choice between two things but he would choose the easier of the two, so long as it was not a sin; if it was a sin he would be the furthest of the people from it Narrated by al-Bukhaari (3367) and Muslim (2327) –

It cannot be taken in any way whatsoever as meaning forsaking sharee'ah and falling short in duties. Rather the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was the keenest of people to achieve true submission to Allaah ('uboodiyyah) with all that it implies. What is meant by “the choice between two things” is with regard to worldly matters where Islam does not command or forbid anything, or matters in which there is a broad choice between what is Sunnah and what is mustahabb. But if the shar'i ruling indicates that something is obligatory or prohibited, then that must be adhered to, without overstepping the mark or falling short.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Fath al-Baari (6/575):

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The words “between two things” mean, of worldly matters. This is indicated by the words “so long as it was not a sin”, because there is no sin in matters of religion. The words “so long as it was not a sin” mean, so long as the easier of the two did not imply sin. If it did imply sin, then he would choose the more difficult option. In the hadeeth of Anas that is narrated by al-Tabaraani in al-Awsat it says: “but he would choose the easier of them, so long as Allaah would not be angered by it.” end quote.

And Allaah knows best.