

## What Your Preacher Doesn't Know Can Hurt You

- **Philippians 2:12** *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*
- It has been nearly a quarter century since the world was shocked by the news of a mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana on November 18, 1978. Under the guidance of their charismatic leader, the Reverend Jim Jones, 913 people drank punch laced with cyanide rather than face the prospect of seeing their group disbanded by government officials who had come to investigate.
- Since Jonestown, there have been several other mass suicides, all attributed to religious ideas that were “off the wall” ...
- **December 1990** – Twelve people died in a religious ritual in Tijuana, Mexico, apparently after drinking fruit punch tainted by industrial alcohol.
- **December 1991** – Mexican minister Ramon Morales Almazan and 29 followers suffocated after he told them to keep praying and ignore toxic fumes filling their church.
- **October 1993** – Fifty-three hill Vietnamese tribe villagers committed mass suicide with flintlock guns and other primitive weapons in the belief they would go straight to heaven. Officials said they were the victims of a scam by a man who received cash donations for promising a speedy road to paradise.
- **April 19, 1993** – At least 70 Branch Davidian cult members died after fire and a shootout with police and federal agents ended a 51-day siege of the compound near Waco, Texas. The sect's leader, David Koresh, who had preached a gospel of sex, freedom and revolution and told followers he was Jesus Christ, died of a gunshot wound to the head sometime during the blaze.
- **October 1994** – The burned bodies of 48 Solar Temple members were discovered in several chalets in Switzerland. At the same time, five bodies, including that of an infant, were found in a chalet north of Montreal. The international sect that believes ritualized suicide leads to rebirth on a planet called Sirius.
- **March 1997** – Authorities discovered the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult including leader Marshall Applewhite. They ingested a combination of vodka and drugs at Applewhite's instruction because they were convinced that the only way to survive Earth's being "recycled" in the year 2000 was to be picked up by a UFO flying in the wake of the Hale-Bopp comet.
- According to cult expert Dr. Margaret Singer, the cults have used tactics of coercive mind control to negatively impact more than 20 million victims in the last ten years in the United States alone.
- According to Dr. Paul Martin, the cult problem is so prevalent that the chances of a family member joining a cult are greater than a family member catching chicken pox, four times greater than contracting AIDS, 90 times greater than contracting measles, and 45,000 times greater than contracting polio.
- All cult groups function, to one degree or another, through **mind control**, which works by bypassing **rationality** and eliminating **free will**. Any time a church or preacher asks you to “check your brain at the door” it should raise a big red flag!
- Having said that, we must still be careful to realize that Biblical Christianity demands a life of **faith** in a God that we cannot see!
  - **2 Corinthians 5:7** *For we walk by faith, not by sight:*
  - **James 2:20** *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*
  - **Isaiah 55:9** *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*
- So, since we do have to put our faith in something that the human mind cannot **fully understand**, perhaps the most important question is ... How do I know which religion is right? Which church is right? Which preacher is right? And the answer is ... Look to the Bible! Believe the Bible! Trust in the Bible!
  - **2 Peter 1:21-21** *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*
  - **Acts 17:11** *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*
- The Bible specifically says that “all roads do NOT lead to Rome” when it comes to interpretation. Every idea is not right! Every church is not right! Every preacher is not right! So, **who is right?**

- There are TWO EXTREMES on either side of the TRUTH. On one side is RELATIVISM, and on the other side is CULTISM – and both of them are WRONG!
- **RELATIVISM**: THE TEACHERS OF THE “NEW TOLERANCE” ARE WRONG!
- Webster’s Dictionary defines “tolerate” as “to recognize and respect others’ beliefs and practices without sharing them” or “to bear or put up with someone or something not especially liked.”
  - This attitude is what Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:7 when he said that love “endureth all things.”
  - The Bible says, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” (Romans 12:18)
  - We are told to “receive ye one another, as Christ also received us.” (Romans 15:7)
  - The Word of God makes it clear how Christians are to act toward each other and toward those outside the faith: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10)
- Traditional tolerance is perfectly compatible with such scriptural commands because the traditional understanding of tolerance has meant:
  - respecting and protecting the legitimate rights of others, even those with whom you disagree and those who are different from you. (“everyone has a right to his own opinion”)
  - listening to and learning from other perspectives, cultures and backgrounds.
  - living peaceably alongside others, in spite of differences.
  - accepting other people, regardless of their race, creed, nationality, or sex.
- Traditional tolerance values, respects and accepts the individual WITHOUT NECESSARILY approving of or participating in his or her beliefs or behavior.
- Traditional tolerance differentiates between what a person thinks or does and the person himself.
- However, most of the time when you hear the word “tolerance” used today – by schoolteachers, news anchors, government officials, activists, celebrities, perhaps even by ministers – it does not refer to traditional tolerance but to the “new tolerance.”
- The new tolerance may sound like traditional tolerance, but it is vastly different. It is based on the unbiblical belief that “truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths.” (Stanley Grenz)
- “The definition of new ... tolerance is that every individual’s beliefs, values, lifestyle, and perception of truth claims are equal ... There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative.” (Thomas Helmbock)
- This view is reflected in such oft-heard statements as:
  - “No one has the right to tell me what’s right or wrong.”
  - “It’s wrong to try to impose your beliefs or morals on someone else.”
  - “I have the right to do whatever I want as long as I’m not hurting anyone.”
  - “You have to do what you think is right.”
  - “You have your value system and I have mine.”
  - “I don’t feel the same way.”
  - “Look ... that’s YOUR opinion.”
- Such views are not the exception today, even among Christian young people. An extensive study revealed that 57% of the youth in evangelical churches already believe that “what is wrong for one person is not necessarily wrong for someone else.” Nearly 80% of 18 to 34 year-olds believe there is “no unchanging ethical standard of right and wrong.”
- In contrast to traditional tolerance, which asserts that everyone has an equal right to believe or say what he THINKS is right, the new tolerance says that what every individual believes or says IS equally right. All truth claims are equal. **BUT ...**
  - **THE LAW OF NON-CONTRADICTION** (BASIC LOGIC) insists that two contradictory ideas cannot both be true. Hinduism teaches that when a soul dies it becomes reincarnated in another form; Islam (among others) asserts that souls spend eternity in heaven or hell.
  - **THE BIBLE** MAKES IT CLEAR THAT ALL VALUES, BELIEFS, LIFESTYLES AND TRUTH CLAIMS ARE NOT EQUAL! It teaches that the God of the Bible is the true God (Jeremiah 10:10), that all His words are true (Psalm 119:160), and that if something is not right in GOD’S SIGHT, it is wrong (Deuteronomy 6:18). This is not just the view of Hebrew, Christian or Western culture – it is truth, according to the God who rules over all cultures!

- The basic premise of the new tolerance is that there is no difference between who a person is and that person's beliefs, behavior, culture or lifestyle. Written as an equation, it would look like this: **WHAT I AM = WHAT I DO**
- Therefore, if you express any disagreement with someone's beliefs, say that their behavior is wrong, or can't accept their lifestyle, you're judging and being intolerant of THEM! In other words, if you don't approve of a person's lifestyle, you don't LOVE THE PERSON.
- **But Scripture does not teach that what we do is equal to who we are!** When Isaiah wrote, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2), he made a clear distinction between who we are and what we do (our iniquities).
- **Praise God that what we do is not the same as who we are,** for otherwise God could not have separated our sins from us and thrown them into the sea of his forgetfulness! (Micah 7:18-19)
- The spirit of the "new tolerance" has in great measure infiltrated the church of the last days. That is why people have the false ideas that "all interpretations of Scripture are equal" and "to tell someone their belief or behavior is wrong is being judgmental." But the Bible contains ABSOLUTE TRUTH!
- **CULTISM: THE LEGALISTIC EXTREMISTS ARE WRONG!**
- Because of their preoccupation with the "new tolerance," the media and even mainstream Christianity are all too quick to throw the accusation of "CULT" at anyone who stands for the absolute truth of the Word of God. For this reason alone, we must be careful to judge religions, churches, preachers and sermons BY THE BIBLE, and not by any other standard.
- The definition of a "CULT" is "a religious group differing significantly from 'normal religious expression,' often with a charismatic leader." A group is deemed to be cultic if they ignore or purposely omit central Apostolic doctrines, or if they hold to beliefs which are distinctly opposite to "orthodox Christianity."
- There is no problem with this definition if you want to define the terms "normal religious expression," "Apostolic doctrine," and "orthodox Christianity" by the Bible!
- For example, the word "orthodox" comes from the root words "orthos" (right, true) and "doxa" (opinion), so it originally meant someone who held the "right opinion" or "true doctrine." However, today the word "orthodox" means "holding to church creeds, maintaining the doctrine of the Trinity." THESE ARE NOT THE SAME THING!
- Do you realize that, although the Bible declares that there is "One God," there are those who would declare "Oneness believers" a cult?
- Do you realize that, although the early church was founded on the full salvation message of "repentance, water baptism and Spirit baptism," there are those who would call "United Pentecostals" a cult?
- Do you realize that, although the Bible teaches us to evidence our faith by our attitude, actions and appearance, there are those who would call "Holiness churches" a cult?
- SO WHAT IS A CULT? Some common cult characteristics:
  - A centralized human authority which tightly structures both philosophy and lifestyle
  - A "we vs. they" complex, pitting the supposed superior insights of the group against a hostile outside culture
  - A commitment for each member to intensively proselytize the unconverted
  - An entrenched isolationism that divorces the devotee from the realities of the world at large
  - The claims of Jesus Christ are made optional at best, denied at worst
- Pastors are unequivocally given the spiritual oversight of the people they lead, and we are given the Scriptural charge to obey them. Yet there is another sense in which each of us must "work out our own salvation."
- ***Hebrews 13:17*** *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*