

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
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- 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.*
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- It has been some 60 years since the revolt in 931 BC that split the Jewish nation into the 10 tribes of Israel in the north and the 2 tribes of Judah in the south. While Judah will have a handful of good kings during the time of the divided kingdom, Israel will have none; her backslidden rulers plunge her further into sin and further away from Jehovah the longer they are permitted to reign.
 - Ahab is the seventh king of Israel, and he will reign for 22 years from his capital city, Samaria. He has a taste for splendid architecture, which he will indulge by building an ivory house and several cities. In addition to his capital in Samaria, Ahab also will erect a royal residence at Jezreel, built partially on land he steals from Naboth after having that loyal subject put to death on false charges.
 - His worst mistake will be his politically-arranged marriage to the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. This heathen princess named Jezebel so controls her weak husband that he soon establishes a temple in Samaria for the worship of the god Baal, and high places in honor of the goddess Asherah, where orgies of legalized vice, perverted sex and human sacrifice are common.

- ***1 Kings 16:33*** *And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.*
- The priests have either succumbed into silence, or fled to Judah in search of a place where they will not have to compromise righteousness to avoid persecution. The prophets of Jehovah have been persecuted and slain or escaped only by being hid in caves. No godly leadership is left in Israel!
- The licentious character of Baal worship has a subtle attraction for the austere Hebrews who are bound to serve a holy God under a chaste and rigorous moral code. So strong is the tide of corruption that it appears as if the knowledge of the true God will be lost among the Israelites.
- Elijah is basically "a nobody from nowhere." Referred to only as "the Tishbite," he is from the small town of Tishbeh in Gilead. We know absolutely nothing else about his family or birth, but his name means "My God is Jah (Jehovah)." With God on his side, he didn't need to be a somebody! He will eventually become the most famous and dramatic of Israel's prophets, a powerful man of God.
- He literally came out of nowhere three and a half years ago when he appeared suddenly before wicked King Ahab with a pronouncement from Jehovah.
 - ***1 Kings 17:1*** *And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*
- Baal was the Canaanite god of the elements (sun, rain, fire, storm) and was often pictured with thunderbolts in hand, standing on the back of a bull, or in the form of a bull himself. Baal became king of the gods by defying Mot, the god of death, who had killed him and taken him to the underworld. Baal was called back to life by the goddess Anat, who slashed herself with knives as a sign of mourning. Thus, Baal worship involved this grotesque and bloody ritual.
- This kind of heathen worship had been prevalent in the nations around Israel, but God's concern was that His people were now "blending" the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal. Baal was a "multiple deity," with each locality having their own Baal whose full name they kept secret (Baal-Shamim, Lord of the skies; Baal-Hammon, Lord of wealth; Baal-Gad, Lord of good fortune). Since the word Baal meant "master" or "lord," the Israelites even

used this name to speak of Jehovah, the Lord! It was this kind of association, assimilation and compromise that God hated!

- **Isaiah 42:8** *I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*
- Because of Baal's supposed power over the natural elements, the pronouncement of Elijah must have seemed like the raving of a lunatic to King Ahab. But crop failures and the full horrors of a nationwide famine soon convinced him otherwise!
 - **James 5:17** *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*
- Over the past forty-two months, while Israel has been starving, Elijah has been sustained by the miraculous power of God. First fed by ravens at the brook Cherith, and then kept by the widow of Zarephath, he has never gone hungry. This widow was a Phoenician of Jezebel's own race, by birth a believer in idolatry. Jezebel's comrade was unwittingly aiding Jehovah's champion!
- Most of the people wanted to worship Baal and God at the same time. The worship of idols was not proposed as a **substitute for**, but as an **accompaniment to** the worship of Jehovah! They had no objection to dividing their allegiance, as long as they kept on good terms with the ruling powers!
- They wanted to do the impossible and amalgamate opposites, but this God would not allow! Two religions which are diametrically opposed cannot both be right. You cannot enjoy the smile of the world and the "well done" of Christ at the same time! Divided service is dishonoring to God, as it puts Him on the same level as Baal ... and He will not share His glory!
- The contest Elijah puts forth could not have been more advantageous to the prophets of Baal:
 - **1 Kings 18:23-24** *²³ Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: ²⁴ And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.*

- Baal was the god of fire – this should have been no contest! The priests enjoyed a vast majority in numbers, the patronage of their rulers, popular favor with the people, and impressive glittering vestments. They also got to petition their god first, and spend nearly the whole day in prayer. They were passionately earnest, furiously persistent, fiercely religious, and undeniably sincere!
- **BUT IN THIS TERRIBLY ONE-SIDED CONTEST, THEY STILL LOST!**
- After dressing their sacrifice and placing it on the altar, the prophets of Baal called on the name of their pluralistic god from morning till noon, leaping up and down at the altar. At noon, Elijah began to mock them and they began to cut themselves in frenzied worship, adding their blood to that of the sacrifice. They prophesied until the time of the evening sacrifice, but to no avail!
 - **1 Kings 18:27** *And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.*
 - **1 Kings 18:29** *And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.*
- Elijah digs a trench about his altar, and drenches the sacrifice and the altar with twelve barrels full of water, until the trench is filled. **He has put himself at a distinct disadvantage, for his way is so much "harder" than the prophets' way.** But only then does he offer his prayer to the Lord:
 - **1 Kings 18:36-37** ³⁶ *And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. ³⁷ Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.*
- The reaction from Heaven is immediate – and convincing! **The contest that could never be settled with words is now settled by Divine demonstration!** Anyone can build an altar, but God only sanctifies "His altar" with the fire! The fiery breath of the Almighty settles the question.

- **1 Kings 18:38-39** *³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.*

- **FIRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SIGN OF GOD'S ACCEPTANCE.** Divine fire marked Abraham's covenant with Jehovah, Moses' call to lead Israel at the burning bush, the dedication of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the consecration of Solomon's Temple. The altar fire – not kindled by any human hand or replenished by any material fuel – was the sign of Divine approval.
- God's people have never been allowed to compete with the religious world on equal terms! Instead, God gives to "Baal" every advantage and reduces His own resources to a minimum, in order to show that **TRUTH AT ITS LOWEST IS STRONGER THAN ERROR AT ITS HIGHEST!**
- The sin and worldliness of man-made religion is allowed to parade itself, employ its uttermost resources, and consume the entire day while true holiness apparently takes a backseat. Truth looks to be in the minority, but **THE REAL MAJORITY IS WHERE GOD IS!**
- Remember that any man-made religion, evolved out of the spirit of the age, will always command a large following of sincere and earnest people. But earnestness is not everything! **Unless the altar is built God's way, there is "neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded."**
- When God displays His superior power, it is not just convincing to the false prophets, but to His Elijahs also. **God proves that His truth owes absolutely nothing to the world's favor or help.** The earthly medium through which His grace shines must be as plain as possible!
 - **1 Corinthians 1:25-29** *²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: ²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

When Jesus said "whosoever will" He didn't mean
"whoever wants to" – He meant "whoever obeys!"

Mark 8:34 *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will** come after me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Matthew 7:13-14 *13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and **narrow is the way**, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Matthew 22:11-14 *11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: 12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 **For many are called, but few are chosen.***

Revelation 17:14 *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are **called, and chosen, and faithful.***

John the Baptist used the phrase "the Holy Ghost and fire" and there were "tongues like as of fire" on the Day of Pentecost. WHAT DOES THE FIRE MEAN? Fire supplies power, it transforms, it refines, it purifies and illuminates. The "Holy Ghost and fire" is the baptism of the Spirit ACCOMPANIED BY THE POWER TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The God that answers by fire – let Him be God! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The God that answers by "changed lives" ...!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elijah "intolerantly" has the false prophets killed to silence their message in Israel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new birth message is an intolerant one! It allows no other message to exist beside it!