

How to Identify a False Cult

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding obscure passages in the Bible and the dangers of heresy that can arise from misunderstanding these passages.

Duration: 28:54

Scripture: Psalm 145:17, Matthew 16:18, Romans 14:11, 1 Corinthians 15:29, 1 Timothy 3:2, Hebrews 9:27, 1 Peter 3:19

Topics: "False Cult"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of judgment and the role of Jesus in preaching to those who have died. He emphasizes that God treats every human being as an intelligent being and never violates their intelligence. The preacher also delves into the difficulty of understanding certain passages in the Bible, using the example of baptism and the resurrection of Christ. He concludes by highlighting the importance of seeking knowledge and not being content with ignorance.

Transcript

We are continuing in 1 Peter, and I am trying to be honest and teach all, and not do like the commentaries do, skip the hard places. This, that I say, is a hard passage of Scripture. Peter might very well have had himself in mind when he said that Paul wasn't, things very hard to be understood, in which the unstable and the unlearned were restricted.

Paul said, Peter said that about Paul, but he might have said it about himself, because he did give us something very difficult here. Verse 18 of chapter 3, For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, unjust that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. So he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometimes were disobedient when once the long suffering of God was in the days of Noah.

While the ark of God was a prepared, very few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. He gave her unto an even baptism, thus also now save us. Not the putting away of the children in the flesh, but the answer to the good counsel of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven and is in the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers subject unto him.

Verse 6 in chapter 4, For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit. Now verse 21 tells us about baptism being a figure and a good conscience toward God and the resurrection of Christ. Verse 25,

And in his high place of authority over angels and powers, these men can see as much as the adulterer is quite foolish.

So I am to speak about Christ, there is in prison, or verse 6, to them that are dead. And I will say that there is more in this this morning for the curious than there is for the... But I am still not going to pass it up for a number of reasons. One is that the passage is here by reason.

And if it had not been intended that we should expound it, or attempt to understand it, it would not have been put here. There are options in the scriptures. But even though the few passages were divinely inspired, and for that reason we need to be treated with respect, even if we are not able fully to understand it.

The second reason that I am going to courageously attempt an exposition here is that I want us to be fully informed. We cannot be informed fully if we skip the hard places and all major scriptures that can be understood. And third, and I think this is the most important of the three, all teachers specialize on difficult texts.

Heresy always thrives in obscurity, or on obscure passages, and dies when the full light of God reaches it. Let us take such a passage as 1 Corinthians where it talks about the baptizing for the dead. Now it tells us that, else, verse 29, else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? Not at all.

Why are they then baptized for the dead? Now Paul puts that there, and exactly what is meant by it. And certainly he did not approve it. He only used it casually for a future life.

But there are those who practice baptism for the dead, and if you object to the scriptures, they could do that obscure and difficult passage from 1 Corinthians 15. Say, why would you object when there were those in Corinth that baptized for the dead? So they make a whole list upon one verse. Let me give you a good working rule for the understanding of scripture.

If you want more than one verse to support it, don't teach it. Because if it isn't found in two verses of the Bible, then chances are it isn't found there either. And that what you think is the passage of certain things does not teach it at all.

Now suppose that I were going to argue for a future life, and I were writing to people who practice masses for the dead. And how can you deny the future life when you practice saying mass for the dead? I was saying to them, in effect, now you yourself admit a future life because you are acting as though those persons who had died were still in existence. Therefore you yourself believe in a future life.

The very practice of saying masses proves it. But that wouldn't mean that I opposed saying masses for the dead. So that I was arguing that they believed in a future life by the fact that they attempted to help people in the people.

Paul meant here. Paul did not in any wise practice baptism for the dead, nor did he exhort anybody to do it. But he appeals to something they already, some of them at least, did to show how inconsistent they were in saying that there was no resurrection.

And it's obvious that the said there was no resurrection were the same ones who practiced baptism for the dead. And then take that famous, learn to use the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Now that's obviously an obscure passage.

I have never heard it. Chattis factually explains we'll give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven and whatever you open will stay open and whatever you close will be closed. Now isn't it clear that Roman Catholic friends will deny that the Bible has any authority over the church on the ground.

The Bible came out of the church and not the church out of the Bible. And they will deny the whole scripture because they say, well, you don't understand it. And besides that, it isn't binding upon us because the Bible is the daughter, not the church, the daughter of the Bible.

Therefore, the Bible has no authority over the church. But if you complain that the Pope, Christ, vice-dearest on earth, they will run to that obscure passage. I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom.

And they say, how dare you deny. Well, the Bible says, I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom. And that was Peter.

And this Pope is the descendant of Peter. But Paul's teaching always hunts an obscure passage. Obscure passage.

Which reminds me of the Mormon missionary that was traveling. And somebody said, you believe a wife, how do you do with that passage? It says, let a bishop be the husband of one wife. He said, that means at least one.

He hadn't explained anyhow. Well, a heresy always hunts obscurity. And Paul's teaching often gives itself shape.

If you see my brethren, it is like, if I were to take you to my head of farm, and I would say to you, now here you will find apples and peaches and grapes, and here are watermelons and cantaloupes and sweet potatoes, and fifteen or twenty edible fruits or vegetables or grains, and say, now this is all yours. And I would come back a month later, and find my guests half starved. And when I would say to them, what's the nary? They would say, well, we are ordinary.

Because we have found a plant that we can't identify. There is a plant behind the old oak stump, back there near the end of the far field, just over the hill. And we have spent years trying to identify this plant.

But I would say, you're starving. You look sick. You'll get TB.

What's the matter with you? And they would say, well, we're worried about this one verse, this one plant. What will all the God's children do? They starve themselves to death, knee deep in clover, because there's one little old plant back in the rear end of the field that they can't identify. And heretics always starve themselves to death while they worry at the best about that one obscure passage of Scripture.

So I'm going to root it, in order that nobody will come and worry me with it and say that they know what it means, and that approval goes on. Now, what this verse doesn't teach, or these verses do not teach, is universalism. You know universalism is the belief in the restitution of all fallen beings to a state of blessedness.

Some believe in the restoration of all human beings to blessedness. Not only Christians, but all human beings to blessedness. Then there is another kind of more exhaustive universalism, which teaches the restitution of all human beings, but the devil and all the fallen angels.

They're very generous and take in everything, every man, every creature that has fallen and sinned against God. Now this is a dream born of desire. Universalism is teaching that every moral creature that would finally be saved is a dream born of desire.

And it springs from humanitarian motives, no doubt. Humanitarian schemes within the brain lead us to desire the salvation of all. But it is not taught in the Scriptures.

The Bible specifically teaches that except we repent we shall all likewise perish. And it pictures us a hell where the angels are and where all that are not found in the Book of Life are finally consigned. So the teaching of the Bible is not universalism.

And whatever this passage teaches, which I have already been hearing, it does not teach universalism. And it does not teach a second chance. Now, the Russellites, I do not call them Jehovah's Witnesses because I do not want to spoil them by identifying it with any false teachers.

But the Russellites teach that there is a second chance. They say that every body that dies will have a chance in the future world. And then if you turn and you will be annihilated.

You will cease to be. When a sinner dies he sleeps in your body and soul in the state of deep unconsciousness. And then when the resurrection comes you will be raised and given another chance.

If you turn down that chance then you will be annihilated and cease to be and there will be no hell. Now that's what the Russellites teach. They will hold up in passages like this.

But this error thrives on Jesus Christ. It cannot stand the full Bible. It cannot stand the teaching of Jesus.

It cannot stand the Book of Romans. It cannot stand the Book of Hebrews. It cannot stand the Book of Revelation.

It cannot stand the four Gospels. It cannot possibly stand up under all the light of the Bible because the night blooms in flames and blooms in its shadow. But as soon as we turn the whole Bible loose on it, it withers and dies.

Now, meaning that there are lost souls. There's a scripture called, Sinners in prison are dead. And some of these in the passage are identified as being the earth's population at the time of Noah's flood.

Heard the message preached and they denied or refused it, rejected it. And the result was that they tore their evil deeds at the coming of the flood. And it teaches us that these all went to the place of the dead.

Hades in the New Testament, Yore in the Old, the place of the dead. And the Christ's body when he lay three days in Joseph's new tomb. But that his spirit was not in his body but separate from his body.

And in that spirit he went and preached to the spirits that were in Hades, the prison. You remember the Apostle's Creed that we, well, we've been trying to read sort of quick. We all believe in the Apostle's Creed.

It says this about our Lord. Behold he goes, born the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried, and resurged again from the dead. Now that's the way we Protestants have it.

But the old Apostle's Creed reads like this. Did Jesus Christ be married, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried, and descended into Hades. And the third day he arose again from the dead.

Now that was only saying what Peter said here. Paul said it, we'll notice later. That when Jesus Christ's spirit was free from the crucified body, that's not like quiescent or hover over the tomb.

Jesus Christ the Eternal, calming his spirit through. And so the work he had to do was to go, descend into him, not into the fires of hell for punishment, but descend to the place of the dead. And there preach to those that had died and whose spirits were confined there.

And so he preached the soundness of knowledge. And he told them why judgment had come. And he justified the ways of God to man.

And expressed what had taken place. In order that they might know that they were being treated as intelligent. Always remember, brethren, that God treats every human being as an intelligent being.

You may be Einstein, but you're morally intelligent, and God will never violate your intelligence. And he will never say to you that you should simply shut your eyes and gulp and swallow whatever you eat. He means that you're an intelligent, moral being, and therefore he will not violate your intelligence.

He treats you like a moral. There's a certain healing evangelist who goes up and down the country, and when anybody comes and says they're ill, they've got a demon in them, and he wants to pray for the demon to go out. He says, for if you do, the demon will go on you.

End of intimidation. That kind of trickery. Why the magician who does tricks for money on a stage wouldn't be so cheap.

Christ is casting out devils and healing the sick. I don't dare look, lest the demon will jump on me. Where do you find that? That's in the New Testament.

Where is that? Anyplace within the confines of the word of God. Nowhere. That's cheap.

And I have no hesitation to look in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, I never did anything with people's eyes shut. I never had to do anything in a house.

No magician's activity should be an open book. Everything from the treasure's receipt book, up and down the church of Christ, should be open to the eyes of mankind. And there's never any place in the Bible where God treats me as if I didn't have to attend.

So that even the spirits that were in prison, even those that are in the place of the dead, our Lord went to them in his Spirit and preached to them and explained to them an order that justice might be done. You take an ordinary English or American court, something like this goes on. It's been heard.

The jury goes out and deliberates. They come back in. They pronounce the defendant guilty.

And the judge says, will the defendant please rise and face the court. The defendant rises and says something to this effect. Mr. So-and-so, the evidence has been heard.

And the ears have decided from the evidence that you have been guilty of such and such a crime. Before you are sentenced, is there anything said? In other words, we're about to sentence you, but we're not abrogating your intelligence. We see you like a robot.

You are intelligent human beings. And you are able to judge us. And if we were to wrong you, therefore we want to clear this whole matter up.

Have you any evidence? Usually they don't have. But if there was anything that this intelligent sinner could say, the judge would give it respectful consideration. For in theory at least, American and English courts are not railroader men to the electric chair or the prison.

They're going to do it according to the rules of justice, with all the gears showing and all the processes open before the eyes of mankind. So God, that all the wicked were swept away as by a flood, and hurled to the place of the dead, and they will never see the blessedness of heaven or know God. But we're not simply going to sweep them out as if they were inert bits of silk.

They're human, they're intelligent, they're moral creatures. They're capable of exercising their own rights. Therefore, the everlasting Son of God went before this spirit in prison and preached to the man.

They were spirits, they were alive. They had sinned in the flesh. And they were to be judged for the days they lived in the flesh.

Their whole heart said amen to the judgment of God. Now, my brethren, if you don't believe this, to show why Christ ascended into the place of the dead, into hell, as it says, to give you the sense, turn to that, if you will, for a moment. It says, Wherefore he said, ascended upon high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto man.

Now that is it, but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended, the same also that ascended, a power above all things that he might fill, all heaven that he might fill all things. Here is it, when Jesus Christ's body lay in the grave, his spirit went to those captives in the prison.

And peace relieved to them. And when he arose, he took with him all the redeeming spirit of man that had been shut in the place of the dead. Here it is.

Remember Jacob said, I will go down unto Sheol, mourning for my son. And when Samuel, the dead man, came back him out of the earth, that after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and after Christ had taken with him to heaven, to the place of paradise, Paul said, I was caught up into paradise, to the third heaven. With none but up, the Lord himself, the Lord of life and glory, had taken his ransomed ones out of the place of the dead.

But it contained not only the redeemed ones, but it contained also those that were not redeemed. Separated, however, a great gulf that was fixed. Lazarus and the rich man explain that.

When the rich man died, he went to the place of the dead. And when Lazarus died, he went to the place of the dead. This time Abraham's bosom was a great gulf fixed together.

So when our Lord descended, descended after his death, he descended into Hades. He took all in Abraham's bosom up to heaven and left the rest there. But in doing it, he cleaned it and preached in his spirit to all that were in the place of the dead.

Now, if that isn't enough, let me give you something to learn. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted Jesus and given him of every name. That it can image Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in under the earth.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Not only those in heaven and those on earth, but those in hell are forced to confess with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord. This they do to the glory of God the Father.

So you see, my brethren, that passage that Peter gives to Nebuchadnezzar, he teaches only that Jesus Christ, our Lord, while his body lay in the grave, went in his spirit to Sheol, the place of the dead, and there he preached deliverance to the ransomed, and judgment to the lost, took his ransomed ones with him and left the lost to the dead. But everyone, those under the earth and those on the earth, and all preachers everywhere, admit that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That Jesus Christ, our Lord, rules over any that do not willingly submit to his rules.

He will not in force rule over one human being or one moral preacher, but he will force from the unwillingness of even lost ones the fact that he's right. True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord. It will be the only text in hell, the only text in hell, and I'm not sure it won't be cut against the spirit of that terrible place.

True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord. In order that that might come to all the three worlds above and on the earth and beneath, there had to be a declaration of the plan of God to those that are dead as well as those that live. But there is not one sentence, there is not one word, not one letter in the Bible that teaches that Jesus ever preached the dead and said, Come unto me.

He said, Come unto me to the living. But he never preached the gospel of redemption and gave an invitation and said, Come. It is appointed unto men once to die and after that to be judged.

It was done in order that the dead as well as the living, the lost as well as the saved, might know how true and just and righteous our God is and how impeccably, how holy are his ways and that he doeth all things well. I admit that this is not the kind of a message to send you out with moist eyes, but you need to hear this. We need you to know this.

So the next time someone comes pushing your doorbell, you be there. I know what the Bible teaches. Thank you.

Goodbye. Quietly close. Never slam it.

Don't slam it. That's not nice. Christians never slam doors.

But close it rather quickly, I would suggest. Because the false teachers are growing and their numbers are growing, they're leaps and bounds. Our 57th Annual Missionary Council.

We had about 1,100 of them. That summer when I was teaching as a peasant out in the east, we were getting through Lincoln Tunnel. You know why? The traffic was so heavy on the road.

And you know why it was so heavy on the road? Jehovah's Witnesses stayed in. 100,000 strong. After 57 years of missionary work, we get 1,100.

They had 100,000 Churches. So you need to know that Jehovah's Witnesses don't bless you at the time. So you will have a shield of proof to raise you up to the glory of God, of error.

Father, bless thy word. See how wondrous are thy judgments, and thy ways, hath finding us. Receive with bowed heads and present hands the hard and obscure things as well as the easy, plain things.

We thank thee, Lord, that these easy, plain things outnumber the others, perhaps a thousand to one. Bless thou the word, Jesus. For Jesus' sake.

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