

Evangelism and Other Religions Part 6b Buddhism 6/4/23

Introduction

**Taken from my article, *Why I Am Not a Buddhist*, The CrippleGate.¹

- Buddhism is a major world religion, with about 500 million adherents.
- It is based upon the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also known as “Buddha Shakyamuni,” or “the Buddha.”
- Though the details of Gautama’s life are debated, it is generally believed that he was born into a royal Hindu family sometime around 500 B.C. in a Himalayan foothill kingdom near the Nepal-India border, in a place known as Lumbini.

1. The Origin of Buddhism



- Various ideas surround Siddhartha’s birth and upbringing. It is thought by some that his mother recognized that he would be great at his conception and birth.
- Others assert that demonic beings attempted to obstruct his birth and arrival.
- Siddhartha’s parents raised him in a traditional stream of Hinduism at the time. Many other supernatural claims exist surrounding his upbringing, such as him saying, “This is my last life,” at his birth.
- Siddhartha’s father shielded him from the hardships of life in his royal grounds. However, at the age of 29, he observed what is called “The Four Passing Sights,” which forever changed him; a crippled old man, a sick man groaning in the streets, a decaying corpse, and a wandering ascetic man.

¹ <https://thecripplegate.com/why-i-am-not-a-buddhist/>

- Thereafter, he battled with the idea that everyone is destined to decay and die numerous times. In order to understand and solve this problem, Siddhartha left his wife, son, and life of luxury to pursue the life of an ascetic.
- Many in that day believed that Absolute Truth could be found and the cyclical birth, suffering, death, and rebirth could be terminated through such a life.
- For several years Gautama practiced a form of Hindu asceticism in search of this salvation. Through extreme self-deprivation, like starving and almost killing himself, he became disillusioned and abandoned the practice.
- At the age of 35, Siddhartha achieved the salvation he sought. He decided to meditate while sitting under a Bodhi tree (Bodhi, meaning “enlightenment”) for 49 days.
- It was supposedly then that he was able to free himself from distraction and achieve spiritual enlightenment, or nirvana. Henceforth, Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha.
- The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, India is thought to mark the location of his experience.
- The Buddha then made it his quest to help others achieve nirvana. He left no writings and biographies of his life were not produced until later, in the Lalitavistara and the Buddhacarita, sometime around the first and second centuries.
- It should be noted there are various streams of Buddhism, including Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism. Vajrayana is that Buddhism common in Tibet. Zen Buddhism (zen, meaning “absorption” or “meditation”) has its origins in the Mahayana stream, as does Pure Land Buddhism.

2. Sacred Texts

- The chief Buddhist scripture is called the Tripitaka, which is divided into three parts.
- First, is the Vinaya Pitaka, which teaches rules of conduct for monks.
- Second, is the Sutta Pitaka, which are thought to be discourses spoken by Siddhartha and his disciples.

- Third, is the Abhidhamma Pitaka, which are the teachings of the Sutta Pitaka systematized to facilitate the study of the nature of mind and matter.
- Some Buddhists view these texts as authoritative, while others teach that no individual text conveys all of the beliefs.

3. Deity

- Siddhartha Gautama did not seem to teach on a Creator or absolute being. In general, Buddhism does not propose to worship an individual or personal deity.
- The Buddha is revered in various ways. One line of thinking considers him an omnipresent and eternal being who guides individuals to truth.
- Another proposes that Buddha was simply a mortal being who gained and dispensed the knowledge of enlightenment. Other ideas are that gods do exist, but they are not creators nor sovereign over humanity.
- They need to experience rebirth just like people. However, human beings are not accountable to a personal deity.

4. The Universe and Creation



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- Buddhism does not address a creation event, per se, nor discuss many details about the creation of the universe.
- Instead, somewhat similar to Hinduism, it teaches that the material world is mostly illusion.

- There are various realms of existence into which a person can be birthed, depending upon their moral performance.
- The cosmos are thought to be in a never-ending cycle of formation and destruction.

5. The Nature of Man

- Human existence is composed of material body, feelings, perceptions, karmic tendencies, and consciousness.
- However, the human being is in continual change.
- Buddhism does not teach the existence of an eternal soul, though humans are thought to possess the Buddha-nature as their true nature, though many are ignorant of this.
- Thus, humanity is not born with a sin nature.

6. The Human Problem

- Buddhism teaches a human problem similar to that of Hinduism.
- Human beings are somewhat trapped in the cycle of rebirths due to cravings and lusts such as greed, hatred, and ignorance.
- They are not accountable to a personal being who determines a moral standard.
- However, individuals are responsible to observe a certain code of morality.
- This code is spelled out in the Five Precepts, which includes commands to avoid killing, stealing, lying, unchastity, and partaking of alcohol and drugs. The way in which they do will result in good or bad karma, and determine his/her movement towards salvation-nirvana.
- Karma is the sum of a person's deeds in previous lives.
- Good karma contributes to receiving a body favorable to achieving salvation, or nirvana and the liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.
- Bad karma distances the individual away from salvation-nirvana, causing them to be reincarnated into an inferior existence.

- Thus, the common western understanding of karma is incorrect. Typically, westerners assume, “If I do good things, good karma will accumulate with good coming back to me in this life.”
- But the true meaning of karma is not to receive good in this life, but to escape the vicious birth-suffering-death-rebirth cycle at some point in a future existence.

7. Salvation and the Gospel of Buddhism

- Similar to Hinduism, salvation is referred to with a few terms. Moksha is the liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
- While Hinduism teaches the path of severe asceticism, Buddha taught a Middle Path in which a person seeks nirvana between the extremes of asceticism and self-indulgence.
- Through right living and the pursuit of enlightenment, Buddhists aspire to escape the cycle of rebirths and reach nirvana.
- Buddhism’s ultimate goal is not rebirth in a heavenly realm, but escape from the cycle of rebirth. One must become enlightened to escape suffering.
- The type of body a person receives in their rebirth hinges upon the moral actions they performed in a previous life and the karma accrued therefrom.
- Nirvana describes the reality of salvation, or enlightenment, where the individual has achieved Buddhahood and thenceforth escaped the law of karma with no additional rebirth to occur.
- It is the enlightened state completely free of egocentrism and suffering. As a state of consciousness, it is beyond definition.
- The individual who achieves nirvana in this life may choose to be a “Bodhisattva,” which is a person who delays entering final enlightenment/nirvana in order to help others reach nirvana.
- Central to Buddhism and achieving salvation-nirvana is understanding the Four Noble Truths.
 - Dukkha, life is suffering.
 - Samudaya, all suffering is caused by cravings and attachments. Our cravings and desires result from ignorance.

- Nirodha, human suffering can be ended by overcoming cravings and attachments.
- Magga, the path to conquer suffering is achieved through what is called the Noble Eightfold Path.

This path is as follows: right worldview/ understanding, right intentions/commitment, right speech/communications, right actions (the Five Precepts mentioned above), right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplative absorption.

- More could be said about Buddhism, for example, regarding the dynamics of monastic life in Buddhism, the Four Boundless States, and the Three Marks of Conditioned Existence.
- Statues and shrine are common in Buddhism. Perhaps the most famous were the Buddhas of Bamiyan, built sometime around A.D. 500, by carving a cliff in the Bamyian valley in central Afghanistan.
- The two ancient statues, standing at about 115 and 175 ft, were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.
- It should be noted that Buddhism is often proposed as a peaceful system. However, Buddhism has been known for persecuting others. Today, in one of the most Buddhist countries of the world, Christian pastors have been imprisoned and beaten publicly for their faith in Christ.

With that, here are **5 Ways that Buddhism Conflicts with Biblical Christianity.**

1. **Buddhism's teachings are not rooted in an objective source or historically-verified events.**
 - On a purely horizontal level, there are some social benefits to Buddhism's altruistic teachings. However, the teachings are not derived from an objective or historical source. They originate from a man with a human nature. Whether or not the various supernatural claims occurred in Siddhartha Gautama's life is debated and questioned by Buddhist scholars. But we do not have writings from multiple eye-witnesses to the actual events.
 - Furthermore, Buddhism's teachings have evolved from the subjective spiritual state of Siddhartha Gautama and his experience. The salvation-nirvana he achieved is not based in external objectivity, but in a subjective spiritual demeanor he is said to have achieved.

- There is no verifiable source to substantiate his claims. Despite the potential social benefits of various Buddhist doctrines, it cannot be taken as authoritative due to the subjective nature of its teachings.
- Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, is rooted in an objective source, with its redemption claims working out in history. Additionally, it is grounded in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. His life, teachings, death, resurrection, and ascension – the basis of Christian salvation – was witnessed by many individuals and recorded in the Bible.
- The 66 books of the Bible, internally and externally, are demonstrated to be a unified body of God-given revelation, and, therefore, objective, inerrant, and authoritative. Internally, the Bible is said to be the very words of God (2 Tim. 3:16), originating from God (2 Pet. 1:19-21), without error (Ps. 12:6, 119:89), and having no interference from man (2 Pet. 1:19-21). The resurrected Christ was witnessed by over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6). Since Christ accurately predicted his resurrection, every other teaching of his must be embraced.
- No event in the Bible has been shown to be false. Externally, the Bible has stood up to centuries of fierce scrutiny. The thousands of Greek texts of the New Testament portray extraordinary unity. The Dead Sea Scrolls, written ca. 200 B.C., contain most of the Old Testament, including hundreds of prophecies of Jesus Christ, many of which were fulfilled during his first advent. Therefore, the Bible's teachings must be embraced as absolute and authoritative over the Tripitaka, and any other sacred text.

2. **Buddhism denies the existence of a personal Creator and God.**

- One of the most striking features of Buddhism is its denial of a first cause to the universe; a personal Creator and God. Perhaps this is also one of the appeals: the individual is detached from accountability to a sovereign superior.
- However, both the creation outside and conscience inside preach to every human that the personal God of the Bible exists and holds us accountable (Rom. 1:20, 2:14-15).
- Therefore, on this account, Buddhism demonstrates itself to be a system of rebellion, suppressing the truth of God's existence (Rom. 1:18-19).

3. **Buddhism teaches that suffering is self-induced.**

- For Buddhism, suffering is caused by cravings and attachments. Our cravings and desires result from ignorance. Suffering can be ended by overcoming these cravings and attachments through the Eightfold Path.
- However, sometimes suffering occurs for reasons entirely outside of ourselves and our attachments. Fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and weather can be a cause of suffering; of legitimately bad things. Rape, murder, assault, verbal attack, also, are immense instruments of suffering which originate outside the individual, their ignorance, and consciousness.
- Real evil is present in the world in various forms. There exist personal beings, as well, whose goal is to inflict evil.
- Even so, the reality is that suffering is not meaningless or out of control. Suffering is not an impersonal negative occurrence in our lives. It occurs under the sovereign hand of God (Eccles. 7:13-14). Things, though immensely difficult at times, are never out of control (Ps. 33:11; 93).
- The God of the Bible is sovereign over suffering. This also means that he has a purpose in our suffering. For those who trust in him, suffering becomes an instrument in his hand to accomplish good (Rom. 8:28).
- One day, all wrongs will be made right (Rom. 12:19). The sufferings of this life will not compare to the blessings in the next (Rom. 8:18, 2 Cor. 4:16-18). In heaven, faith will become sight such that we will understand all of the God-glorifying purposes which suffering served (Rev. 21:1-7).

4. Buddhism teaches a system of works-based righteousness.

- One of the biggest problems with Buddhism pertains to the issue of salvation. Since Buddhism teaches that humanity possesses the Buddha-nature, it denies the inherent sinful nature altogether.
- Salvation involves escape from egocentrism, suffering, and the birth-death-rebirth cycle. However, Scripture teaches that all humanity is born with a corrupt nature inherited from the first man, Adam (Rom. 5:12, Eph. 2:1-3).
- Consequently, all human beings are both unable and unwilling to please God (Rom. 8:7).
- God's moral-spiritual standard for humanity is total conformity to his own perfection (Matt. 5:48, Gal. 3:10).

- Until we experience his salvation through Jesus Christ, our nature, thoughts, words, and deeds are in violation of his standard. We are not stuck in a cycle of rebirth (since we die once and then comes judgment, Heb. 9:27), but stuck in our sinful nature.
- Our problem is not ignorance of a set of laws, but willful rebellion against a personal God (Rom. 3:9-18).
- Our predicament is not a cycle of rebirth, but a guilty standing before holy God. If not solved, our death will eventually usher in our punishment; eternity in conscious, literal torment in hell (2 Thess. 1:7-9, Rev. 20:11-15).
- Buddhism's gospel is one of bad news: it is a crushing system of works combined with uncertainty.
- Karma is a highly self-centered system: the incentive for good works is the individual. Much of the motivation is me.
- Further, Buddhism's methods of works and meditation are inadequate to accomplish objective, personal salvation from our sin and the just wrath of God.
- The means of salvation does not involve the grace of an external Savior, but works of individual effort to accumulate good karma. However, achievement of nirvana might never occur.
- How much karma is enough? If the individual fails to accumulate sufficient good karma, they could be perpetually stuck in the birth-suffering-death-rebirth cycle. Moksha and nirvana, therefore, are anything but certainties.
- Only if the individual sufficiently observes the Eightfold Path, meditation, and accumulates good karma can escape from the cycle and arrival at enlightenment be achieved. However, those achievements are still insufficient to save.
- Overall, the system of salvation which Buddhism proposes is false since it fails to account for, and deal with, the necessity to be made in right standing with the personal Creator and God.
- Instead, we need the salvation provided by the God of the Bible in Jesus Christ. Motivated by his own mercy, God architected and executed a plan of breathtaking grace on behalf of guilty sinners (Eph. 1:3-14).
- This salvation would be achieved through no works of sinners—they are entirely corrupt. Instead, it would be a plan of grace—bestowing upon the guilty that

which they were unwilling and incapable of earning when they deserve eternity in hell.

- In eternity past, God determined to redeem an ill-deserving people for himself through his Son.
- In verifiable history, he stepped out of heaven, took to himself a human nature while maintaining his deity (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus Christ then lived that life of utter conformity to God's standard of total perfection (Heb. 4:15).
- He did so in order that he would offer his own life in the place of sinners. In his death by crucifixion, God the Father placed the penalty of sinners upon his own Son, Christ, so that he would justly forgive the unjust (Isa. 53:5-6^L, 10^L; Rom. 3:25-26^L; 1 John 4:10^L). Three days after his substitutionary atoning death, Christ rose bodily from the dead, demonstrating both his deity and sufficiency as a sacrifice for sinners (1 Cor. 15:4^L, Rom. 4:25^L). For all who turn from their sin and put faith in Jesus Christ, God instantly declares them in permanent right standing with him, possessing the very righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:25-28^L, 2 Cor. 5:21^L, Eph. 2:8-9^L). From that moment, the individual is reborn by the Spirit of God, sealed for eternity, and progressively conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30^L). Upon death, they will instantly enter into the joyful presence of Christ, where suffering and death are no more, a state which will never cease (Luke 23:43^L, 2 Cor. 5:6^L, Rev. 21:1-7^L). For this reason, the salvation described in the Bible is called, "good news."

5. Buddhism teaches that salvation is found from within oneself.

Since, as Buddhism teaches, all people possess the Buddha-nature within, salvation is a matter of unleashing that nature. Nirvana is a state which must be realized. Through meditation, a deepening mindfulness may lead to a releasing of undesirable thoughts and motivations. But it might not. The deeper we go, the more sin we will discover.

However, simple experience demonstrates that humanity does not possess salvation within. At times, those who understood themselves to a great degree; who plunged the depths of their own mind only increased their misery due to the darkness they saw. Additionally, ignorance alone is not the contributor to humanity's problem. Some of the most brilliant and informed minds have revealed a great capacity to morally err.

More importantly, the Bible teaches that within humanity is not an unrealized Buddhic nature, but sin (Jer. 17:9^L). The deeper we dive into and explore the human nature, the more we will discover caverns full of that which is displeasing to the God of the Bible. As the apostle said, "I know that nothing good dwells in me" (Rom. 7:18^L). Housed within unredeemed man is a nature hostile to our good and personal Creator, God. All

sin every committed in the world was not due to unrealized goodness, but manifested depravity.

Consequently, for any system to achieve actual, individual salvation, that means of salvation must be external to humanity. In fact, this is what the God of the Bible offers. Salvation is accomplished through the work of one individual; the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone possesses the nature sufficient to save man. Through his death on the cross and resurrection, he accomplishes that which man could not. Man accesses the benefits of salvation by turning outside of himself, forsaking any hope in himself and placing it entirely in Jesus Christ alone by faith (John 14:6^L, Acts 4:12^L). Man's need is a mediator outside of himself who can stand between holy God and his sinful self. Jesus Christ is that mediator (1 Tim. 2:5-6^L).

Conclusion

More could be said about Buddhism. We must lovingly appeal to Buddhists to turn from their erroneous teaching and submit themselves to the word of God in the 66 books of the Bible. There they will find the saving knowledge of the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ for right standing with God.

Sources: World Religions, by Thomas A. Robinson & Hillary Rodrigues; Charts of World Religions, by H. Wayne House; aboutbuddhism.org; buddhismnow.com.