

THE CHAOS OF THE CULTS

Reading: Genesis 3:1-21

9. BUDDHISM

How influential is religion in the world ? The question hardly needs asking. If the world is anything, it is religious. It is no exaggeration to say that the history of man is the history of religion. Four major religions alone comprise the great majority of the world's population. *Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, have about 5 billion members, which explains our concentration on these subjects.* But this is not just a number, it embodies flesh and blood people, people who are born, live and die day after day, folks whose very souls are at stake. One of these religions I have mentioned is Buddhism whose founder is Buddha. There are 500-600 million Buddhists in the world today, and over 500 thousand in the USA. It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California Jerry Brown, Tina Turner, Richard Gere, and Steven Seagal. The Dalai Lama has become a prominent spiritual figure for many throughout the world.

The Dalai Lama has always been a combination of the chief spiritual leader, and the chief political leader of Tibet. The present Dalai Lama lives in exile in Nepal, he

remains spiritual leader of his people, even under their oppression by the Chinese government. Now for many Buddha as his picture portrays him, is a large fat man who sits in the lotus position with his arms often held out in meditative fashion. But Buddha is not a religious figment of the imagination but was in fact a real man whose name was Siddhartha Gautama. Now how did Buddhism originate ? What are the central beliefs of Buddhism ? How does the Christian message compare with what the Buddha taught ? For the sake of simplicity and clarity I want us to consider.

1. The Founder of Buddhism:

2. The Features of Buddhism:

3. The Fallacies of Buddhism:

(1) THE FOUNDER OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism, began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama, since no biography was recorded until five hundred years after his death. Today much of his lifestory is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different and sometimes contradictory accounts of Gautama's life. But let's try and get to grips with,

(a) THE COMMENCEMENT OF THIS RELIGION:

Siddhartha Gautama was born around 560 B.C. in northern India. His father Suddhodana, was a ruler over a

district near the Himalayas which is today the country of Nepal. **Suddhodana was a wealthy man who sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth.** However, when he was a young married man with a son of his own, Gautama, one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls. He saw four things that forever changed his life. The first thing he saw was an *old man*. He was struck by the weakness of the man, and also the affects of the age on the human frame. The second thing he saw was a *sick man*. The third sight Siddhartha Gautama witnessed was a *dead man*. There was a fourth sight which he observed and that was of a *religious man*. This was a positive experience for Gautama because although this religious man was a begging monk. He seemed to have a joyful aura about him.

Siddhartha Gautama was convinced that this inner happiness had nothing to do with external pleasures, so he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find an answer to the problem of pain and human suffering. He even left his wife and child, and traveled the country seeking wisdom. *He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests with very little possessions and little food.* One day, ill from having no food at all, he collapsed and then came to the realization that what he was doing, as a Hindu holy man was no good. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. He soon concluded, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self-realisation but only weakened the body and mind. Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation.

While deep in mediation under a fig tree known as the Bohdi tree, which means “*the tree of wisdom,*” Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness known as nirvana. He came to learn new truths that would not only change his life, but that would bring forth a major world religion. Siddhartha Gautama then became known as the “*Buddha,*” “*the enlightened one.*” He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering, and now his message needed to be proclaimed to the whole world. You see, for the Buddha the essential problem of humanity was not really one of sin and selfishness, or rebellion against God, as the Bible teaches. No, the fundamental problem of man was open of suffering and misery. ***But how could suffering be alleviated ?*** It was that occupied the Buddha’s thoughts and under the fig tree he allegedly received “*enlightenment,*” on the matter. Buddha formulated the foundation of Buddhism, which is the four noble truths and the eight fold path.

You see, Buddhists believe that everyone in the world is suffering, and that the reason for our pain and suffering is caused by our desires, our selfish cravings and appetites for pleasure. Now if you can eliminate the desire, you can eliminate the suffering and Buddha maintained that the Eight Fold Path can eliminate the desire, then you may achieve a state called “*Nirvana.*” Now from a Christian viewpoint, Siddhartha attempted to find a solution to the symptoms of man’s problem, instead of the basic problem itself. And what is man’s basic problem ? Sin. Buddhism does not refer to sin in any of its teaching, but the Bible clearly explains the origin of suffering as a consequence

of sin. (Gen 3:16-17) Now Buddha made it clear that he had not received his enlightenment from any deity. He attributed all realization, attainments of wisdom, and other achievements to human intelligence. He said on one occasion,

A man and only a man can become a Buddha. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a Buddha. If he so wills it and endeavours. (Buddhism Right or Wrong, Jim Allis, p 4)

Do you see what he is saying ? Man is his own master and there is no Higher Being or Power to whom he is accountable. One of Buddha's well known sayings is,

One is one's own refuge, who else could be the refuge ?
(Buddhism Right or Wrong, Jim Allis, p, 4)

You see, he taught and encouraged each person to develop himself and to work out his own freedom, for man has the power to free himself from all bondage. Now this how Buddhism commenced but think not only (a) but of,

(b) THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RELIGION:

When Buddha emerged from his experience under the fig tree he met with five monks who had been his companions. He began to share with the truths he had come to see and understand. From that day for 45 years, he taught all classes of men and women, kings and peasants, bankers and beggars, without making the slightest distinction between them. By the time of his

death at the age of 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India. Today, the vast majority of Buddhists live in Nepal, Tibet, Vietnam, China, Korea, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and of course India. Buddhism is now common in the West. David Legge in his book, Strongholds Shaken says,

A film recently was released entitled ' Seven Years in Tibet,' starring a Hollywood celebrity and the Hollywood star Brad Pitt. This film is about ' the Lord Buddha,' the Dali Lama of the day, and traces the story of his life. Brad Pitt claims to have been greatly affected by the film. Another interesting feature is that Richard Gere, a devour Buddhist wanted to produce the film. This shows a greater awareness and acceptance of Buddhist beliefs. Gaynor Faye, a British Television actress, is also Buddhist. The celebrity factor obviously popularizes Buddhism. (Strongholds Shaken David Legge, p, 156)

So in the West Buddhism is enjoying increasing acceptance. So much for the (1) What are,

(2) THE FEATURES OF BUDDHISM

Now remember the main question, Gautama, the founder of Buddhism sought to answer was this, “ *Why is there pain and suffering ?*” His belief in reincarnation, the belief that after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower of life according to his good or bad deeds, prompted another question. “ *How does one break this rebirth cycle ?*” The basic teachings of Buddhism, focus on what the Buddha believed to be the answer to these

questions. These basic principles are found in The Four Noble Truths and in The Eight Fold Path. Consider Buddha's teaching on,

(a) *THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS:*

According to Buddhism these four noble truths explain the reasons why people suffer.

1. *The First Noble Truth is: The Existence of Suffering:*

To exist means to encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.

2. *The Second Noble Truth is: The Cause of Suffering:*

Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. The reason why humans suffer is because they desire that which is harmful for them.

3. *The Third Noble Truth is: The End of Suffering:*

Suffering will stop when a person can rid himself of all desires. To be free of suffering one must give up. Get rid of, extinguish this very craving, so that no passion and no desire remain.

4. *The Four Noble Truth is: The Extinguishing of all Desire by Following the Eight Fold Path:*

The eight fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving. (Kenneth Boa, Cults, World Religions and the Occult Wheaton, Victor Books 1977 p, 35)

Now what is,

(b) *THE EIGHT FOLD PATH:*

Dr. Walpole Rahula has had the highest honorary title ' *Supreme Master of Buddhist Scriptures,* ' conferred upon him and he comments on the Eightfold Path.

Buddha taught that man has to discipline himself to succeed. This is possible by not only understanding suffering and how to detach oneself from it, but also how to live positively each day. Buddha taught that eight steps are necessary. (Buddhism Right or Wrong Jim Allis p, 11)

1. *Step One: Man must have the Right View:*

You must accept the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path.

2. *Step Two: Man must have the Right Resolve:*

One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness and cruelty, and you must harm no living creature.

Step Three: Man must have the Right Speech:

You must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander or vain talk.

Step Four: Man must have the Right Behaviour:

Do not destroy any living creature, abstain from stealing, dishonest dealings, from sexual immorality, and killing.

Step Five: Man must have the Right Occupation:

One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms none. Buddhism is strongly opposed to any kind of war, when it lays down that trade in arms and lethal weapons is an evil and unjust means of livelihood.

Step Six: Man must have the Right Effort:

You must seek to eliminate evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. Strive to acquire good qualities and encourage those you do possess to grow, increase and be perfected.

Step Seven: Man must have the Right Contemplation:

Or the Right Mindedness. You are to be mindful and attentive with regard to,

1. The activities of the body:
2. Sensations or feelings:
3. The activities of the mind:
4. Ideas, thought, conceptions, and things

Step Eight: Man must have the Right Meditation:

When you have abandoned all sensuous pleasures, all evil qualities, both joy and sorrow, you must then enter the four degrees of meditation which are produced by concentration.

You see, the emphasis in this eight fold path is self-discipline in body, word and mind, self-development and self purification. And then you may possibly attain

“*nirvana*,” an eternal state of being, where suffering is a thing of the past. Now when you read the Sermon on the Mount and the epistles of the New Testament they also speak of a disciplined life. **However, they make it clear that such a life is not attained by man’s effort but rather by God’s power.** It is the Holy Spirit working within the believer that makes such a life possible. Do you recall what Paul says in (Gal 5:17) ? Another translation puts it like this, “*for the desires of the flesh are opposed to the Holy Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the flesh, (godless human nature) for these are antagonistic to each other.*” The word “*contrary*,” means “*to be opposite*,” or “*to be in continual opposition*.” The “*old you*,” and the “*new you*,” don’t get along. The flesh and the Spirit are mortal enemies. Civil war. Yes.

Now when Paul talks about the “*flesh*,” he does not mean “*the body*.” The human body is not sinful, it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit, but if the flesh controls the body then we walk in the lusts or desires of the flesh. **You see, the flesh stands**

for that part of man's nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. The flesh represents the sinful tendencies that become a part of your existence at birth. The unbeliever is a one natured man, the flesh, the Christian is two-natured, the old sinful flesh and the new Spirit nature, which came to him at conversion. Paul explains the contrariness of these “ *the flesh lusteth against the Spirit*,” (5:17) You see, the old nature does not vacate the premises when the new tenant takes up his residence. Here is a dark room at night it has a darkness nature, in common with the night outside. Now you come into that room, switch on the light, and at once a new nature is manifest, a light nature at variance with the night outside. Now that the new nature is present, has the old darkness nature gone ?

Turn out the light and see. No, the old is still there, but the new counteracts it. So when we admit Him who is “ the Light,” into our lives the new does not eradicate the old, but it counteracts it. Paul having made his point that man cannot live the kind of life he knows he should (Gal 5:17) then lists the wicked things he is capable of. Look at (Gal 5:19-21) So what is the answer to an unfruitful life ? Paul explains in the next few verses. (5:22-25) The Buddhist says a man has power in himself to overcome the evil passions of the flesh. The Bible teaches the impossibility of this task. Only by a greater power than man possesses can the impossible be done. Paul puts it like this, “ *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” (Phil 4:13) There is another feature that in Buddhism that I want to highlight and that is,

(c) THE THREE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS:

1. The First Concept is Karma:

For Buddhism, as in Hinduism, this is the moral law of cause and effect. According to the law of karma,

You are what you are and you do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations. (Davis Taylor & Clark Offner The World's Religions, Norman Anderson ed Downers Grove Intervarsity 1975 p 174))

You see, for a Buddhist what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in the present life. Buddhists believe that each person must go through a process of birth and rebirth unless he reaches the state of “ nirvana,” in which he breaks this cycle.

2. The Second Concept is Samsara or Transmigration:

This holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddhism teaches reincarnation, but denies the soul, so what reincarnates ? The Buddhist believes that only “ *energies,*” which have been within him in life will leave him at death and pass into some other person at birth. But the Bible teaches the very opposite. Man does have a soul that is eternal. It will never go out of existence. Its precious for the Lord Jesus says, “ *For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own*

soul ? (Mk 8:36) In Christ we can only find rest for our souls. (Matt 11:29)

3. The Third Concept is Nirvana:

The term means “ *the blowing out of existence.*” Buddha taught that if the Four Noble Truths are accepted, if the Eight Fold Path was followed and put into practice, disciplining one’s every thought, word and deed, through serious meditation, then “ *nirvana,*” was possible. Patrick Zukeran was raised in the Japanese Buddhist culture. He says,

Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven, but rather an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering. (Patrick Zukeran Probe Ministries)

My how different is our prospect of glory. For the Bible teaches that man not only has a soul, but that the soul of a person does not cease to exist at death. The body, house, or tent the soul lived in dies or sleeps but the soul cannot be annihilated, for the Bible reveals that the soul of the believer enters heaven at death, and when Christ returns that soul will be clothed with a new body, “ *fashioned like unto His glorious body.*” (Phil 3:21) Now I am aware that I have not covered everything about Buddhism, but I trust I have given you enough to ponder. I want to draw the study to a close by pointing out,

(3) THE FALLACIES OF BUDDHISM

What are its errors ? Can I say that they are in error,

(a) In Relation to our Authentic Scripture:

One of the most basic problems in Buddhism is that no one is certain what “ *true Buddhism,*” is. You see Buddha’s words were never recorded, so it is impossible to ascertain if what we have are the genuine words of Buddha, or those of his perhaps less enlightened disciples centuries later. Buddhist scholar Edward Conze says,

I confess that I do not know what the ‘ original gospel,’ of Buddhism was. (Edward Conze Buddhism Its Essence and Development New York Harper & Row p. 27)

Charles Prebish is professor of Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University and editor of Buddhism A Modern Perspective, In an essay, he points that Buddha told his disciples they could

“ abolish all the lesser and minor precepts.” (Buddhism A Modern Perspective University Park and London, Pennsylvania University Press 1975 p. 29)

Unfortunately, he never identified what these were, leading to great confusion among his disciples and the formation of innumerable sects. I mean where does the Buddhist turn to find what Buddha really said ? Buddha’s teachings are uncertain but Christ’s teaching rings with a note of certitude. The Buddhist scriptures are unclear but the Word of God is clear. Buddhism has thousands of conflicting spiritual works but we have one Bible that is

authoritative, inspired, inerrant, infallible, the living Word of the living God.

(b) In Relation to our Majestic Sovereign:

Buddhism does not believe in a deity. There is no supreme authority over man. Man has evolved and is responsible to nobody but himself. Do you know what the Bible says ?

“ The fool has said in his heart there is no God.”

(Ps 14:1) Man does have a Creator to whom he is subject. Hear again the opening words of the Bible,

“ In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) John Philips says,

There it stands in all its naked force, the opening statement of Scripture. No attempt is made to water it down, to apologize to a skeptical age, even to prove that God is. The Holy Spirit simply seems certain truths to be self evident, the first and foremost that God is. In one sublime statement He sweeps aside atheism, by asserting His existence, polytheism, by declaring Himself to be one, and pantheism by separating Himself from matter.

My our very lives depend on God. Job could say in the Old Testament that his very breathe was held in the hand of God. (Job 12:10) Paul tells us that in God,

“ we live, and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

Every breathe we take is a gift from God, our lives sustained by Him.

(c) In Relation to our Specific Sin:

I mean, what is the basic problem of mankind ? Is it not sin ? Think of a perfect world without greed, lust, war, crime and all the rest, and you have a suggestion of heaven. My if there is one Biblical doctrine that requires no independent confirmation, it is the doctrine of human sin, which everyone knows is universal, and the cause of the great majority of human problems. *But Buddhism does not refer to sin in any of its teachings.* Buddhism teaches that the root of all evil is ignorance and that man is his own Saviour through following the truth revealed and expounded by the Buddha. How different is the teaching of the Word of God. The psalmist David said, *“ Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* (Ps 51:5) Paul said there is no difference in humanity, *“ For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* (Rom 3:23) We are all sinners, we are all lawbreakers, and we are all guilty. Buddha, in the Four Noble Truths tells us that the cause of suffering is desire, but the Bible tells that the cause of suffering is sin.

Does (Gen Ch 3) not reveal the effects of sin ? What were they ? Sorrow, (3:16) separation from God, (3:23) and suffering. (3:16) Estrangement from God is the worst kind of suffering. Because Adam sinned against God he was ***summoned*** (3:9) he was ***searched*** (3:10-11) he was ***sentenced*** (3:14-19) and he was ***saved*** (3:20-24) clothed in skins at the expense of an innocent substitute, a clear picture of Calvary where Christ, the Son of God died to deliver us from our sins. (Rom 8:1-2)

Buddhism seeks to deal with the symptoms of man's problem, but God deals with the source. Is there anything better than that? To know that God, through Jesus Christ, can deal with the problem of your sin.

(d) In Relation to our Historic Saviour:

Indeed Buddhism sees no need of a Saviour, for it teaches that man can correct himself. He has latent power within to draw upon to become all that he desires to achieve. Buddhism teaches that man is his own Saviour, but the Bible teaches that man needs a Saviour and His name is Jesus. (Matt 1:21) Peter declares, “ *Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.* ” (Acts 4:12) Buddhism is not the answer to sin and suffering, but Christ is. Do you know the difference between Buddha and Christ? Patrick Zukeran makes some comparisons.

1. Buddha did not claim to be Divine, but Christ did:

The idea that he was divine was developed in Mahayana Buddhism 700 years after his death. But Christ claimed to be divine. Why the very “ *I am's,* ” in John's gospel indicate deity. Do you recall what He said to Philip? “ *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.* ” (14:9) The Jews declared, “ *we have a law and by our law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God.* ” (Jn 19:7)

**Thou are the everlasting Word
The Father's only Son
God manifestly seen and heard
And heaven's beloved One**

2. Buddha showed the way to nirvana, but Christ is the way to God:

Buddha claimed to be “ *a way shower.* ” He showed the way to nirvana, but it was up to each follower to find his or her own path. How different from Christ. Christ did not come to show the way, He is the way. He said, “ *I am the way, the truth, and the life no man cometh unto the Father but by me.* ” (Jn 14:6) Buddhism teaches that “ *salvation,* ” comes through Buddha's teaching, but Christ taught salvation is found in Him alone.

3. Buddha is buried in a grave in Kusinara, at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains, but Christ is alive forevermore:

“ *Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen.* ” (Lk 24:5-6)

**I serve a Risen Saviour
He's in the world today**

Do you believe that? Well, are you doing anything to reach the 500 odd million Buddhists in this world? What about your family and friends? What are you doing to bring them to know this Risen Saviour?