

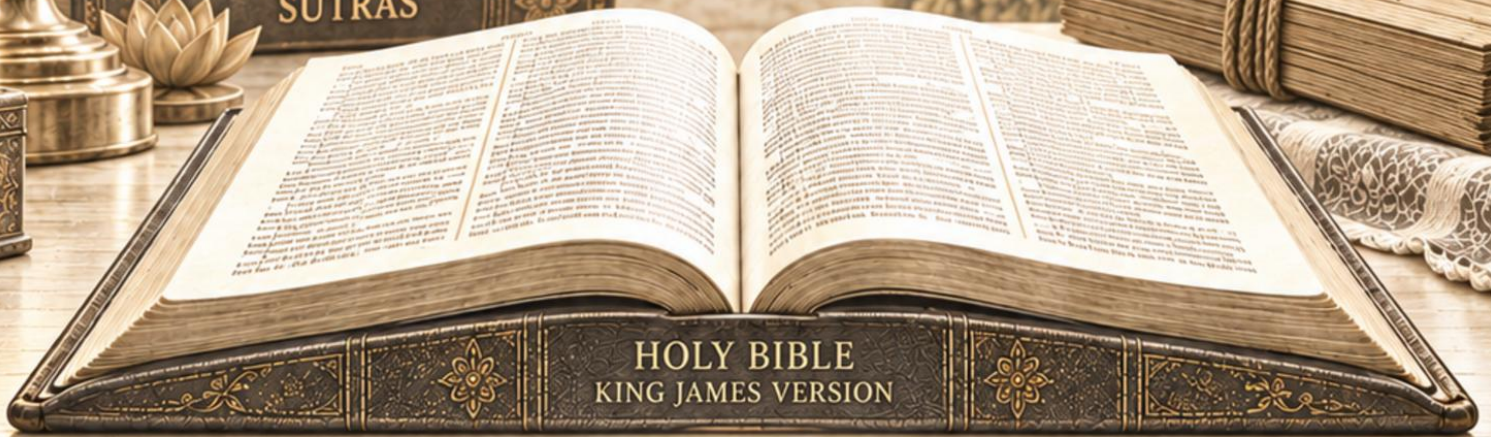
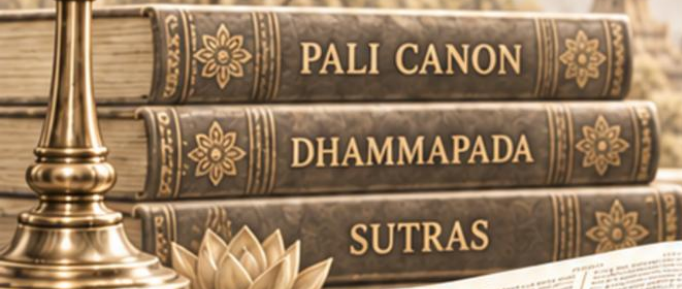
REASON TOGETHER CHURCH



HOW DOES BUDDHISM DIFFER FROM THE BIBLE?

A FIVE-PART SERIES | PART FOUR OF FIVE

ACTS 17:11



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

How Does Buddhism Differ from the Bible?

Full Sermon Manuscript

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we are asking a serious question about one of the world's most influential religious traditions: How does Buddhism differ from the Bible?

That question is not an invitation to ridicule Buddhist people.

It is not permission to repeat careless claims.

It is not an excuse to treat a neighbor as an argument that needs to be defeated.

It is an invitation to listen carefully, speak honestly and bring every teaching beneath the authority of the Word of God.

Many people encounter Buddhism through a statue in a restaurant, a meditation class, a quote on social media or the word mindfulness.

But Buddhism is much larger and much more complicated than any one of those things.

It includes ancient texts, monastic traditions, devotional practices, philosophical schools, meditation systems and cultural expressions that developed across many nations.

Not every Buddhist believes precisely the same thing.

Theravada Buddhism is not identical to Mahayana Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhism is not identical to Vajrayana Buddhism.

Zen is not Pure Land.

Tibetan practice is not identical to Thai forest practice.

And the Buddhism practiced in an Asian family may look quite different from a Western mindfulness class.

So we will be fair.

We will let Buddhism speak in its own categories.

Then we will open the Bible and ask what God has said.

Our Scripture reading comes from Colossians chapter 1, beginning in verse 15.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, the Bible says:

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself.”

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word.

Give us honesty as we examine beliefs that differ from our own.

Keep us from pride, mockery and careless speech.

Give us compassion for every person and courage concerning the truth.

Above everything else, help us see Jesus Christ clearly as Creator, Savior and risen Lord.

Teach us today through Your Word.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

The story of Buddhism begins with suffering.

According to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama was born into privilege in ancient India.

The exact dates of his life are debated, but he probably lived during the fifth century before Christ.

Traditional accounts describe a sheltered young man who eventually confronted realities that wealth could not prevent.

He saw age.

He saw sickness.

He saw death.

He saw that every comfort he possessed was temporary.

That confrontation changed the direction of his life.

He left privilege behind and pursued an answer to human suffering.

He practiced severe self-denial.

He discovered that tormenting the body did not provide the answer.

He rejected both indulgence and extreme asceticism.

Buddhist tradition says that while meditating beneath the Bodhi tree, he attained enlightenment.

He became known as the Buddha.

Buddha is not his personal name.

It is a title meaning the awakened one.

He did not claim to be the eternal Creator described in Genesis.

He presented himself as one who had awakened to the nature of reality and discovered a path of liberation.

The foundation of Buddhist commitment is often expressed through the Three Jewels.

The Buddha.

The Dharma, meaning the teaching or path.

And the Sangha, meaning the community, particularly the community of Buddhist practitioners.

The follower takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

And at the center of Gautama's teaching are the Four Noble Truths.

The first concerns dukkha.

Dukkha is often translated as suffering, but the word reaches farther than physical pain.

It includes dissatisfaction.

It includes instability.

It includes the frustration of trying to find permanent fulfillment in things that always change.

A pleasant experience ends.

A healthy body ages.

A relationship changes.

A possession breaks.

A reputation fades.

Life refuses to remain still.

Even what makes us happy cannot be forced to remain exactly as it is.

The second Noble Truth identifies the origin of dukkha with craving.

We grasp.

We demand.

We try to hold what cannot be held.

We become attached to pleasure, identity and continued existence.

The third Noble Truth says that dukkha can cease.

The fourth presents the Noble Eightfold Path as the way toward that cessation.

Right view.

Right intention.

Right speech.

Right action.

Right livelihood.

Right effort.

Right mindfulness.

Right concentration.

That path is not merely a list of rules for becoming a nicer person.

It brings together ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom.

Its purpose is awakening and liberation.

We should pause here and acknowledge something.

Buddhism sees something real about craving.

Craving hurts people.

Greed hurts people.

Hatred hurts people.

An undisciplined mind can become its own prison.

The Bible does not tell us to deny that.

James chapter 1 says that a person is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.

First Timothy 6:10 warns about the love of money.

The tenth commandment says, “Thou shalt not covet.”

Jesus warned that a person’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

There is genuine wisdom in recognizing that grasping for temporary things cannot provide lasting satisfaction.

But now we must ask the deeper question.

Is craving the deepest thing wrong with us?

Is our greatest need to be released from attachment?

Or is there something even more fundamental between humanity and God?

The Bible does not begin with suffering.

The Bible begins with God.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

Before sickness, God was there.

Before aging, God was there.

Before death, God was there.

Before human craving, God was there.

And the world He created was not evil.

It was not a tragic mistake.

It was not a prison from which an enlightened person needed to escape.

God looked upon His creation and called it very good.

Human beings were created in His image.

They were made to know Him.

They were made to love Him.

They were made to live under His authority and enjoy His presence.

The Bible then tells us why suffering entered human experience.

Genesis 3 does not describe a failure to meditate properly.

It describes rebellion.

God spoke.

Humanity disobeyed.

The creature rejected the authority of the Creator.

Sin entered human experience and death followed.

Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.”

That means the world is not merely impermanent.

It is fallen.

Humanity is not merely uninformed.

Humanity is guilty.

Our desires are disordered because our relationship with God is disordered.

Our minds are darkened because we have turned from the One who is light.

Our suffering occurs within a creation that has been damaged by sin.

This does not mean that every person suffers because of one particular sin that person committed.

The book of Job will not allow that conclusion.

When Jesus met a man born blind, He rejected the assumption that the man’s condition had to be punishment for one particular act.

When a tower fell in Siloam, Jesus refused to say that its victims were worse sinners than everyone else.

But the Bible still teaches that disease, decay and death belong to a world that has fallen away from its Creator.

Romans chapter 8 says that creation itself groans.

It is waiting for deliverance from corruption.

The Buddhist diagnosis says that ignorance, craving and attachment sustain dukkha and rebirth.

The Biblical diagnosis says that we have sinned against God.

That difference changes everything.

If ignorance is the deepest problem, then we need awakening.

If craving is the deepest problem, then we need detachment.

But if sin is the deepest problem, then we need forgiveness.

We do not merely need our ignorance corrected.

We need our guilt forgiven.

Before we go farther, let me mention how giving works at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass a plate.

If you are visiting, we do not expect you to give.

If you are a member of another church, please support your home church.

For those who are led to support this ministry, the giving box is available in the back.

We also invite our guests to complete a guest card with only a first name and email address if you would like to stay connected.

And after the service, please join us in the Pastor's Study on the second floor for Reason Together Café.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

The coffee is free and so are the refills on conversations.

Bring your questions.

Now another major difference between Buddhism and the Bible concerns the person who suffers.

Buddhist teaching commonly speaks of three characteristics of conditioned existence.

Dukkha, dissatisfaction or suffering.

Anicca, impermanence.

And anatta, no permanent independent self.

Anatta is one of the most frequently misunderstood Buddhist teachings.

It does not simply mean that ordinary people do not exist.

It does not mean that a Buddhist cannot use the words I, me or you.

It means that no eternal, independent and unchanging self can be found within the components of human experience.

Early Buddhist analysis speaks of five aggregates.

Form, including the body.

Feeling.

Perception.

Mental formations.

Consciousness.

Each changes.

The body changes.

Feelings change.

Perceptions change.

Mental states change.

Conscious experience changes.

Because none of these remains permanent or fully under our control, Buddhist teaching says none should be identified as an eternal self.

That raises a difficult question.

If there is no permanent self, what is reborn?

Most Buddhist traditions do not answer by saying that an eternal soul leaves one body and enters another.

That description is closer to certain Hindu beliefs than to historic Buddhist teaching.

Buddhism commonly speaks instead of causal continuity.

One moment conditions the next.

One life conditions another.

The later being is not completely identical to the earlier one, but neither is that later being completely disconnected.

Later Buddhist explanations use pictures such as one flame lighting another.

The second flame depends upon the first, but it is not numerically the same flame.

Or think of a river.

The water changes continually, yet there is causal continuity.

This is a stronger explanation than the caricature that Buddhists believe the same unchanging soul keeps receiving new bodies.

We should present the stronger position.

Then we should ask whether it agrees with Scripture.

The Bible does not say that human beings are independent.

Only God is self-existent.

The Bible does not say that human beings never change.

We change continually.

The Bible does not say that the body in its present condition lasts forever.

Our bodies age and die.

But Scripture does teach that the person is real.

The person is created by God.

The person is known by God.

The person is accountable to God.

The person continues beyond bodily death.

And the person will be raised by God.

You are not self-created.

You are not self-sustaining.

You are not unchanging.

But you are personally created, personally known and personally loved by God.

Jesus said that even the hairs of your head are numbered.

He spoke of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as living before God.

He told the repentant thief, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Paul wrote that to depart and to be with Christ is far better.

And Scripture promises that God will raise the dead.

The Christian hope does not depend upon an immortal human ego that can preserve itself.

It depends upon the faithful God who remembers, preserves and raises the people He created.

That leads us to karma and rebirth.

The word karma is often used carelessly.

Someone behaves badly and then something embarrassing happens.

Another person smiles and says, "That is karma."

Historic Buddhist teaching is more serious than that slogan.

Karma concerns intentional action and its consequences.

Actions of body, speech and mind condition experience.

They influence the continuing cycle of birth and death known as samsara.

Buddhism does not need a supreme Judge to administer karma.

Moral causation belongs to the way conditioned existence operates.

The Bible also teaches that actions have consequences.

Galatians says, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

But Biblical sowing and reaping is not karma.

The resemblance must not hide the difference.

In the Bible, moral law rests upon the character and authority of God.

Judgment is personal because the Judge is personal.

And grace is possible because God can forgive the guilty while remaining just.

The gospel does not say that God ignores sin.

It says that Jesus bore sin.

Isaiah 53 says, "The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

First Peter 2:24 says that Jesus "bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

Karma offers no cross where the Creator personally bears the guilt of His creatures.

Karma offers no empty tomb where death is defeated.

Karma continues moral consequences through the cycle of rebirth.

The gospel announces that the Son of God entered history, bore judgment and rose again.

Hebrews 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

The Bible does not teach that we live repeated earthly lives until we attain sufficient insight.

It teaches one earthly life, death, judgment and resurrection.

Resurrection is not reincarnation.

It is not another turn through samsara.

It is the act of God by which the dead are raised.

The same Jesus who was crucified rose bodily from the grave.

He did not escape His body because embodiment was evil.

The tomb was empty.

He showed His wounds.

He ate with His disciples.

He invited Thomas to touch Him.

The resurrection declares that matter is not beyond redemption.

The body is not beyond redemption.

The person is not beyond redemption.

Creation is not beyond redemption.

First Corinthians 15 says that Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Because He lives, those who belong to Him will be raised.

The gospel does not promise another life in which to keep trying.

It announces that Christ has conquered the grave.

Now we come to nirvana.

Christians sometimes say that nirvana simply means a person ceases to exist.

That is too careless.

Buddhist traditions describe nirvana in different ways.

In early Buddhist teaching it is closely associated with the extinguishing of greed, hatred and delusion.

It is the cessation of craving and liberation from the conditions that sustain samsara.

Theravada commonly speaks of nibbana as the unconditioned.

Mahayana traditions may explain liberation through emptiness, Buddhahood or the inseparability of samsara and nirvana when reality is rightly understood.

We do not need to pretend that every Buddhist school gives an identical philosophical definition.

We can still see the central contrast.

The Biblical hope is not liberation from created existence.

It is restored life with the Creator.

Jesus prayed in John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Eternal life is knowing God.

It is reconciliation.

It is fellowship.

It is resurrection.

It is redeemed people living in renewed creation under the loving rule of God.

Revelation 21 does not end with redeemed people escaping creation.

It presents a new heaven and a new earth.

God dwells with His people.

He wipes away their tears.

Death is no more.

Sorrow is no more.

Crying is no more.

Pain is no more.

God does not save us by erasing the person He created.

He saves the person, raises the body and renews the creation.

At this point someone may say, “You make Buddhism sound like everything depends upon human effort.”

That would also be too simple.

Many Buddhist paths strongly emphasize discipline, meditation and wisdom.

But Buddhism also contains devotion.

Some traditions speak about transferring merit.

Some seek the help of bodhisattvas.

Pure Land traditions emphasize Amitabha Buddha and his compassionate vow.

Some speak of other-power rather than relying only upon self-power.

We should acknowledge that.

But other-power is not automatically Biblical grace.

Amitabha is not the eternal Creator.

Amitabha did not become incarnate in the Biblical sense.

Amitabha did not bear sin under the judgment of God on a Roman cross.

Amitabha did not rise bodily from a grave in history.

Pure Land rebirth remains part of a Buddhist account of movement toward enlightenment.

The gospel is not merely assistance added to our spiritual effort.

The gospel is rescue accomplished by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2 says we were dead in trespasses and sins.

Dead people do not complete a path to make themselves alive.

God makes alive.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

That grace then produces a changed life.

Verse 10 says we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Christians do not obey in order to persuade God to save them.

They obey because God has saved them.

The good works are fruit, not the root.

We must also be careful when discussing gods in Buddhism.

It is inaccurate to say that every Buddhist rejects every spiritual being.

Buddhist cosmologies may include devas, heavens, hells, spirits and many realms.

But those beings are not the God of the Bible.

They are not eternal Creators.

They remain within conditioned existence.

They may be subject to karma and rebirth.

The God revealed in Scripture is not the strongest being inside the universe.

He is the uncreated Creator of the universe.

Acts 17 says that God made the world and all things therein.

He is Lord of heaven and earth.

He gives to all life, breath and all things.

And He now commands all people everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day of judgment by the risen Christ.

That one passage brings the differences together.

Creation.

Personal God.

Human dependence.

Repentance.

Judgment.

Resurrection.

What then does Buddhism teach about Jesus?

There is no ancient and universally binding Buddhist doctrine of Jesus.

Individual Buddhists may describe Him as a wise teacher.

Some may admire His compassion.

Some may compare Him to a bodhisattva.

Some may regard Him as an enlightened person.

Some may consider Him irrelevant to Buddhist liberation.

We should never say that all Buddhists officially identify Jesus in one particular way.

But we must also understand that respectful words about Jesus are not necessarily Biblical faith in Jesus.

The Bible does not present Him merely as one enlightened teacher among many.

John 1 calls Him the eternal Word.

Colossians 1 says that all things were created by Him and for Him.

He forgave sins.

He received worship.

He claimed authority over death.

He died for our sins.

He rose bodily.

He will judge the world.

Buddha pointed toward a path of awakening.

Jesus declared that He is the way.

Buddha taught a path intended to escape death's recurring cycle.

Jesus entered death, conquered it and rose from the grave.

The question is not whether Gautama said thoughtful things about suffering.

The question is who Jesus is.

If Jesus is merely a teacher, then you may select the teachings you find helpful.

But if Jesus is Creator and Lord, then every person belongs to Him.

If Jesus died for sins and rose again, then death has been confronted by an event in history.

If Jesus will judge the world, then our deepest problem is not simply dissatisfaction.

It is our guilt before Him.

And if Jesus offers forgiveness, then grace has entered a place karma can never reach.

Perhaps you have used meditation to calm your mind.

The simple act of paying attention or slowing your breathing is not automatically an act of Buddhist worship.

There are ordinary practices of attention and calm.

There are also specifically Buddhist practices built upon Buddhist claims about self, reality, karma and liberation.

We should distinguish them.

Christians do not need to fear every quiet moment.

The Bible tells us to be still and know that He is God.

It tells us to meditate upon His Word.

Biblical meditation is not emptying reality of the Creator.

It is filling the mind with what God has spoken.

It is remembering who God is.

It is bringing our fear, grief and desire before Him.

It is not detachment from personal relationship.

It is deeper communion with the personal God.

If you are speaking with a Buddhist neighbor, listen before you answer.

Ask what that person actually believes.

Do not assume that ethnicity tells you someone's religion.

Do not laugh at a statue or ceremony.

Do not say that Buddhists have no morals.

Do not define nirvana as suicide.

Do not claim that every Buddhist worships Buddha as God.

Speak truthfully.

Then speak clearly about Jesus.

Compassion does not require us to pretend contradictory beliefs are the same.

Respect does not require silence concerning truth.

First Peter 3:15 tells believers to give an answer with meekness and fear.

Meekness is not uncertainty.

It is strength under the control of love.

Christian witness should look like Jesus.

It should be truthful.

It should be gracious.

It should move toward suffering people rather than away from them.

Buddhism sees suffering and seeks a way out of the burning house.

The gospel declares that the Creator entered the burning house to rescue those who could not save themselves.

Jesus did not observe pain from a safe distance.

He became flesh.

He became hungry.

He became weary.

He wept.

He was rejected.

He was wounded.

He was crucified.

He bore our sin.

And on the third day He rose.

Christian hope is not denial of suffering.

It is hope born inside suffering because Christ has conquered sin and death.

You may be suffering today.

You may feel that everything you love is changing.

You may recognize how craving has wounded you.

You may have tried discipline, religion or spiritual practice.

The Bible does not ask you to pretend that suffering is unreal.

It does not deny that craving wounds us.

But it says your need reaches deeper.

You were created by God.

You have sinned against God.

You cannot erase that guilt through moral effort, meditation or another lifetime.

But God loves you.

The Son of God entered suffering for you.

Jesus bore your sins upon the cross.

He died the death sin deserves.

He was buried.

He rose from the dead.

He offers forgiveness as a gift of grace.

He calls you to repent and believe.

To repent is to turn from sin and turn to God.

To believe is not merely to admire Jesus.

It is to trust Him as Lord and Savior.

Romans 10:9 says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

You do not have to accumulate enough merit.

You do not have to attain sufficient insight.

You do not need another life in which to try again.

Jesus does not offer another turn of the wheel.

He offers forgiveness, resurrection and eternal life with God.

If you are ready to trust Christ, speak to Him now.

The prayer does not save you.

Jesus saves you.

But you may tell Him:

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned against God.

I cannot save myself.

I believe You died for my sins.

I believe You rose from the dead.

I turn from my sin and place my trust in You.

Forgive me.

Make me Yours.

Teach me to follow You.

If you have trusted Christ today, please do not leave without speaking with me.

We want to pray with you, answer your questions and help you begin reading the Bible.

You may also meet with us in the Pastor's Study after the service.

Let us pray.

Father, thank You that You did not leave us to rescue ourselves.

Thank You for sending Your Son.

Thank You that Jesus entered our suffering, bore our sins and rose from the dead.

Give comfort to those who are hurting.

Give clarity to those who are searching.

Give humility and love to those of us who speak with neighbors whose beliefs differ from ours.

Keep us faithful to Your Word.

Help us proclaim Christ without pride and love people without surrendering truth.

May every person here know the forgiveness, resurrection hope and eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

As we leave today, remember that knowing the truth should never make us cruel.

If our doctrine is Biblical but our spirit is proud, we are not representing our Savior well.

Listen carefully to people.

Learn their actual beliefs.

Carry their burdens where you can.

And when the door opens, tell them about Jesus.

Tell them that suffering is not the final word.

Tell them that sin can be forgiven.

Tell them that the grave has been defeated.

Tell them that the Creator has come near.

Tell them that Christ is risen.

Tell them that eternal life is not an endless cycle but everlasting fellowship with God.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

How Does Buddhism Differ from the Bible?

Biblical Commentary and Study Companion

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Introduction

Buddhism begins its most recognizable teaching with the reality of dukkha. The Bible does not dismiss the human experience of suffering, but it begins even earlier. It begins with God, creation and humanity made in God's image. This difference in starting point shapes every later question.

This Commentary follows the sermon's movement from suffering to creation, from craving to sin, from no-self to created identity, from karma to judgment, from rebirth to resurrection and from Buddhist liberation to salvation through Jesus Christ.

The purpose is not to belittle Buddhist people. Buddhism includes multiple traditions and millions of people whose beliefs and practices cannot be reduced to a slogan. The purpose is to understand important Buddhist teachings accurately, identify where categories differ and state the Biblical conclusion clearly.

Siddhartha Gautama and the Title Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama was an ancient Indian religious teacher, probably living during the fifth century BC. Exact dates remain disputed. Traditional Buddhist accounts describe a privileged young man whose encounter with age, sickness and death caused him to leave ordinary life in search of liberation.

After experimenting with severe asceticism, Gautama rejected both self-indulgence and extreme self-denial. Buddhist tradition teaches that he attained awakening beneath the Bodhi tree and became the Buddha.

"Buddha" is a title meaning awakened one. It does not mean Creator or Almighty God. Gautama presented a discovery concerning suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to that cessation.

The Biblical Jesus occupies a fundamentally different position. Jesus did not describe Himself merely as one who discovered truth. He declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" in John 14:6. Colossians 1 identifies Him as the One by whom all things were created.

Theravada Mahayana and Vajrayana

Theravada Buddhism principally receives the Pali Tipitaka and emphasizes early discourses, monastic discipline, meditation, wisdom and liberation. It is especially prominent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Mahayana Buddhism receives additional sutras and includes many schools across East Asia. Its teachings often emphasize the bodhisattva path, compassion for all sentient beings, emptiness, multiple Buddhas and complete Buddhahood.

Vajrayana is usually understood as an esoteric form of Mahayana. It employs initiations, mantras, mandalas and visualization under the guidance of qualified teachers. Tibetan Buddhism is its best-known expression.

These descriptions are broad maps. They are not exhaustive definitions. Real Buddhist practice also includes local customs, family rituals, festivals, devotional acts and modern adaptations.

Tradition	Primary emphasis	Representative literature	Important caution
Theravada	Early discourses, discipline and arhat ideal	Pali Tipitaka	Not internally uniform
Mahayana	Bodhisattva path, compassion and Buddhahood	Chinese canon and Mahayana sutras	Many distinct schools
Vajrayana	Mahayana with tantric methods	Tibetan canon and tantras	Not merely exotic ritual

Buddhist Scriptures and Authority

There is no single Buddhist canon accepted in identical form by every Buddhist tradition.

Theravada uses the Pali Tipitaka. East Asian Buddhist traditions preserve extensive Chinese collections. Tibetan Buddhism possesses the Kangyur, Tengyur and tantric materials.

Tipitaka or Tripitaka means Three Baskets. These are monastic discipline, discourses and analytical teaching. Mahayana traditions also receive later sutras that Theravada does not recognize as the historical Buddha's teaching.

The difference from the Bible is not merely the size of the collection. The Bible presents itself as God's revelation. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

Buddhist authority is organized around teachings attributed to awakened insight, canonical collections, commentaries and lineages.

The Three Jewels and the Four Noble Truths

The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha is the awakened teacher. The Dharma is the teaching or path. The Sangha is the community, especially the ordained community but sometimes the wider Buddhist community.

The Four Noble Truths are foundational. They teach that conditioned existence is marked by dukkha, dukkha arises through craving, dukkha can cease and the Noble Eightfold Path leads toward cessation.

Dukkha is broader than physical pain. It includes dissatisfaction and instability. Pleasant experiences are unreliable because they change. The attempt to secure lasting fulfillment from impermanent conditions ends in frustration.

This observation carries real force. Wealth, health and relationships cannot be forced to remain unchanged. Scripture agrees that earthly treasures decay and that human life is brief. It disagrees concerning the final explanation. The Bible traces creation's corruption to sin and promises redemption by the Creator.

Craving Desire and the Eightfold Path

Buddhist teaching does not condemn every possible form of desire. Tanha refers to craving or thirst that sustains attachment and dukkha. Chanda can describe intention or wholesome aspiration. A Buddhist must possess some aspiration to cultivate wisdom and follow the path.

The Eightfold Path includes right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. It unites wisdom, ethical conduct and mental discipline. Its goal is not merely emotional calm. It belongs to the Buddhist path toward awakening and liberation.

Scripture also condemns covetousness, lust and selfish ambition. It does not teach the elimination of desire. It commands people to desire God and righteousness. Psalm 42 depicts thirst for God. Matthew 5:6 blesses those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The Biblical issue is not whether desire exists but whether the heart loves God rightly. Salvation is not the successful completion of a spiritual path. It is the gift of God through Christ, producing a new life of obedience.

Creation Sin and Suffering

Buddhism normally analyzes dukkha within conditioned existence without appealing to an eternal Creator or a historical Fall. Craving, ignorance and attachment sustain the problem.

The Bible begins with a good creation made by a personal God. Human beings are created in God's image. Genesis 3 then describes rebellion against God. Romans 5:12 states that sin entered the world and death by sin.

This does not mean that every person's suffering is punishment for a particular act. Job's friends were wrong to reduce suffering to that formula. Jesus rejected such reasoning in John 9 and Luke 13. Nevertheless, all suffering occurs within a creation damaged by sin.

Buddhism offers a therapeutic and philosophical diagnosis of suffering. Scripture gives a relational and moral diagnosis. Humanity has not merely misunderstood reality. Humanity has rebelled against its Creator.

Therefore the deepest human need is not only insight. It is forgiveness and reconciliation.

Anicca Anatta and Personal Identity

Anicca means impermanence. Conditioned realities arise, change and cease. Anatta means no permanent, independent and unchanging self.

Early Buddhist teaching analyzes human experience through five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Each changes and none is fully controllable. The Anatta-lakkhana Sutta teaches that none should be regarded as "mine," "I" or "my self."

Anatta does not mean that ordinary persons are never mentioned. Buddhist traditions can use personal language conventionally while denying an ultimate permanent self.

The Bible does not describe human beings as self-existing or unchanging. Only God possesses life in Himself. Human beings remain dependent creatures. Yet they possess genuine personal identity because God creates, knows and preserves them.

The Biblical self is not an autonomous ego. It is a person accountable to God, capable of relationship with God and destined for resurrection. God’s knowledge supplies continuity through death. The person who dies is the person God raises.

Karma and Moral Accountability

In Buddhist teaching, karma concerns intentional action and its consequences. It is not merely instant punishment for embarrassing behavior. Actions of body, speech and mind condition present and future experience.

Karma does not require a supreme divine judge. It operates as moral causation within samsara. Traditions differ concerning how karmic results mature and how merit can be generated or transferred.

The Bible also teaches consequences. Galatians 6:7 says that a person reaps what he sows. Yet Biblical sowing and reaping is not karma. Scripture places moral law beneath the authority of a personal and holy God.

The crucial Biblical category is forgiveness. God does not overlook sin. Christ bears it. Romans 3:26 presents God as just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus. First Peter 2:24 says that Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Karmic consequence and substitutionary atonement belong to different accounts of justice. At the cross, the Judge provides the sacrifice.

Question	Buddhist teaching	Biblical teaching
Moral cause	Intentional action and karmic consequence	Personal accountability to God
Final judge	No Creator is required to administer karma	God judges righteously
Forgiveness	Consequences operate within samsara	Christ bears sin and God forgives
Future	Rebirth until liberation	Death, judgment and resurrection

Rebirth Without an Eternal Soul

Buddhist rebirth should not be described as the same eternal soul repeatedly entering different bodies. Historic Buddhism rejects such a permanent self.

The usual explanation is causal continuity. Earlier intentions and actions condition a later existence. The later being is neither wholly identical to nor completely unrelated to the earlier being.

Later texts and teachers have used illustrations such as one flame lighting another, a stream whose contents continually change or a chariot that is designated through its assembled parts.

These illustrations help make the Buddhist claim coherent within its own system. They do not make it Biblical.

Hebrews 9:27 teaches one death followed by judgment. Biblical hope rests in resurrection.

Resurrection means that God raises the person rather than starting another karmically conditioned life.

Resurrection Rather Than Another Life

The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian truth. First Corinthians 15 argues that if Christ did not rise, Christian faith is vain and believers remain in their sins.

Jesus' resurrection was bodily. The tomb was empty. He showed His wounds and ate with His disciples. His resurrection does not present embodiment as a prison. It declares God's victory over sin, corruption and death.

Believers will also be raised. Their bodies will be transformed from corruption to incorruption and from mortality to immortality.

Rebirth continues the cycle of death. Resurrection defeats death.

Rebirth connects lives through karmic causation. Resurrection depends upon the personal action of God.

Rebirth offers further conditioned existence until liberation. Resurrection brings the believer into perfected life with God.

Nirvana and Eternal Life

Nirvana should not be casually defined as extinction or nothingness. Early Buddhist teaching connects it with the cessation of greed, hatred, delusion and the causes sustaining rebirth. Theravada may call it the unconditioned. Mahayana traditions use additional categories such as emptiness and Buddhahood.

The Bible's eternal life is not another name for nirvana. Jesus defines eternal life relationally in John 17:3 as knowing the Father and Jesus Christ. Eternal life includes forgiveness, communion with God, resurrection and renewed creation.

Revelation 21 describes God dwelling with His people. Personal relationship is not the problem to be overcome. Reconciled personal relationship is the promised blessing.

The Biblical hope is not escape from creation but creation healed under the rule of its Creator.

Buddhist Gods Devotion and Pure Land

It is inaccurate to say that every Buddhist rejects every god or spiritual being. Buddhist cosmologies may include devas, spirits, heavens, hells and multiple realms. These beings are not equivalent to the God of the Bible. They are ordinarily neither eternal nor creators and remain within conditioned existence.

Buddhist devotion is also diverse. Some people make offerings, chant, venerate relics or seek assistance from Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Pure Land traditions emphasize Amitabha Buddha, his compassionate vow and rebirth in a Pure Land favorable to enlightenment. Some traditions contrast self-power with other-power.

This prevents the statement that all Buddhist liberation rests exclusively upon unaided effort. It does not establish equivalence with Biblical grace. Amitabha is not the Creator incarnate and Pure Land teaching does not center upon substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection.

Jesus in Buddhist Interpretation

Buddhism has no ancient universally accepted doctrine of Jesus. Individual Buddhists may admire Him as a moral teacher, compassionate figure, bodhisattva-like person or enlightened master. Others may consider Him outside the Buddhist path.

Respect for Jesus is not the same as accepting His Biblical identity. Scripture presents Jesus as the eternal Word, Creator, Lord, sin-bearing Savior, risen King and final Judge.

The Dalai Lama's reflections in *The Good Heart* are valuable because they demonstrate how Gospel passages may be appreciated through Buddhist categories. They also show why ethical admiration does not remove doctrinal disagreement.

The decisive Christian question remains: Who is Jesus? If He is Creator and Lord, His authority cannot be reduced to one helpful spiritual voice among many.

Meditation Mindfulness and Biblical Discernment

The words meditation and mindfulness cover different practices. Simple attention to breathing, clinical stress reduction and quiet reflection are not automatically acts of Buddhist worship.

Specifically Buddhist practices may be directed toward insight into impermanence, no-self, emptiness or liberation. Christians should evaluate not only physical technique but also spiritual purpose and the worldview being affirmed.

The Bible commends meditation upon God's Word. Psalm 1 describes the blessed person meditating in God's law day and night. Biblical meditation remembers, considers and responds to God's revelation.

Christians should neither panic over every quiet exercise nor adopt spiritual claims without discernment.

Speaking With Buddhist Neighbors

Begin with questions. Ask which tradition, if any, the person follows. Ask what karma, meditation, rebirth or nirvana means to that person. Avoid assuming that family background determines personal belief.

Acknowledge genuine observations. Craving can produce misery. Life is unstable. Discipline can expose harmful habits. Compassion is valuable.

Then identify the deeper Biblical questions. Who created us? Against whom have we sinned? Can guilt be forgiven? What happened when Jesus died? Did Jesus rise bodily? What has God promised after death?

Explain Christian terminology. A Buddhist listener may hear "eternal life" as endless continuation within suffering. Explain that Christian eternal life is reconciled life with God, bodily resurrection and renewed creation.

Speak with meekness and clarity. Respect does not require pretending that incompatible claims are identical.

Final Biblical Conclusion

Buddhism takes suffering seriously and offers sophisticated accounts of craving, impermanence, personal identity, moral causation and liberation. Its diversity must be represented accurately.

The Bible provides a different foundation. The world has a personal Creator. Creation was made good. Humanity is created in God's image. Sin has brought guilt, corruption and death. Human beings die once and face judgment. Jesus Christ, the Creator made flesh, bore sin upon the cross and rose bodily.

The Christian message is not that people need one more spiritual technique. It is that God has acted in Christ.

Jesus does not offer another turn of the wheel. He offers forgiveness, resurrection and eternal life with God.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is dukkha broader than physical pain?
2. How does the Biblical doctrine of the Fall differ from the Buddhist diagnosis of craving and ignorance?
3. Why is rebirth without a permanent self different from reincarnation of an eternal soul?
4. How does bodily resurrection differ from another conditioned life?
5. Why is Pure Land other-power not the same as Biblical grace?
6. How can a Christian represent Buddhism accurately without weakening the final Biblical conclusion?
7. What does Colossians 1:15-20 reveal about Jesus that no Buddhist category can contain?

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