

This week Pastor Andy addresses Buddhism in Part 3 of the Christianity and World Religions series. Buddhism is rooted in Hinduism, which was last week's topic. Buddhism is a philosophy built around one man and his thoughts and experiences. The "Buddha" (meaning "the enlightened one") began his life as a prince and a man of means. During his life, he encountered some harsh realities and the fact that dying is unavoidable. As a result, he perceived that life is futile. In his despair, he left his wealth and family and embarked on a life of asceticism. Philosophy alone and extreme asceticism gave no answers to his problems and so, in time, he embarked on a quest to balance a life of asceticism and pleasure. Eventually, he fell into what others described as a "trance" and, upon awaking, reported that he now saw life differently. He had become "enlightened" and laid out what have become the beliefs of Buddhism.

Pastor Andy goes on to list the "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism using video interviews with a local Buddhist monk to clarify these points. These truths are that "Life has suffering"; "Life comes with attachments"; "We can overcome suffering"; and "There is an Eight-fold Path consisting of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration." Karma and reincarnation are central to Buddhism. Since all suffering results from attachments to the things in the world, according to Buddha, the solution to suffering is to follow the Eight-Fold Path and shed these attachments. Once all attachments are gone, one's karma is then good, and the person ceases to exist. The end goal of Buddhism is to be extinguished like the flame of a candle; this is Nirvana.

There are major differences between Christianity and Buddhism. Foremost of these differences is that Buddhism believes that God is irrelevant; i.e., nonessential. In Christianity, a relationship with Jesus Christ and God is central to life.

Buddhism believes that "suffering" comes from attachment to the world. Christians believe that "suffering" results from disobedience to God (sin). The disobedience may be your own, or it may have begun with Adam, but there are consequences in the world today that affect your daily life. For Buddhism, all attachments are "wrong." For Christianity, some attachments are good and are even commanded by God; e.g., the marriage relationship. For Buddhism, peace can be achieved only by ending all attachment (works). For the Christian, peace is experienced through trust in Jesus Christ (faith) and His atoning sacrifice.

The Buddhist view of life after death is that your "karmic force" (that which makes you "you") gets extinguished when achieve complete enlightenment. Christians are created as eternal beings just as God is eternal ("in His image"). For Christians, life is not limited to the time spent here on earth. Instead, one lives forever with God through Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice, or one spends eternity separated from God through unbelief.

One common bridge builder of Buddhism and Christianity is meditation (a high value practice in Buddhism). The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians (4:8), gives believers a list of desirable topics upon which to meditate. These things are similar to the things in the eight-fold path. God wants you to be attached to Him. He wants to hold you in the palm of His hand and keep you safe. Will you invite Jesus to be the savior of your soul today?