

# Buddhism and Jesus Christ

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As a whole, Buddhism has little directly to say about Jesus Christ. It does acknowledge what most men do: that He was a great person. For the most part, however, His Gospel teachings are largely ignored and a more convenient Jesus is accepted: one who, along with the Buddha, smiles serenely.

But on the other hand, there is a sense in which Buddhism explicitly rejects Jesus Christ. What Christian belief in a personal Savior from sin represents to Buddhism is a serious form of personal ignorance. Personal Savior? No “person” exists. So what is there to save? And no genuine Savior can exist either, for we must ultimately save ourselves. The central message of Christianity (Jn. 3:16) is thus dismissed as remnants of beclouded consciousness.

After all, one could expect that in Buddhism the biblical Christ would be rather objectionable, for he rejects what Buddhism accepts and accepts what Buddhism rejects. He stresses sin and repentance before God (Jn. 5:34; Mt. 4:17). He believes in a loving, infinite-personal Creator who makes moral demands upon and judges His creatures (Lk. 12:5). He denies the possibility of self-perfection and refers to himself alone as the Savior of the world (Mt. 20:28; 26:28; Jn. 6:29, 47; 14:6). He not only believes in a creator God, the creator God is His personal Father (Jn. 14:5-6); He is God’s unique and only Son (Jn. 3:16, 18). Spiritual enlightenment and salvation come only by Him (Jn. 14:6) because Jesus is “the true light” of the world (Jn. 1:9; 8:12; 12:46). It is impossible that these could come through Buddha and his philosophy, or through Bodhisattvas and their sacrifice of remaining in the world, or through any other self-achieving method (cf., Mt. 19:24-26). Jesus Christ utterly rejects polytheism and paganism (e.g., Mt. 6:7; 22:37; Lk. 4:8). His worldview is thoroughly based on moral absolutes and it is by His moral standards that all creatures, heavenly and earthly, will be judged and required to give an account (Jn. 5:22-29; Col. 1:16-18; Lk. 10:19-20; 1 Cor. 6:3). Jesus accepted the permanency (Mt. 25:46) and utility of suffering (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9)—indeed it is by suffering alone that the world is redeemed and through which (in part) God sanctifies His people (1 Pet. 2:21, 24; 3:18; 4:1; Phil. 3:10).

Although ecumenically minded people would find it difficult to accept, the Jesus Christ of history is not merely un-Buddhist; He is anti-Buddhist. If we could bring Jesus and Buddha together for a discussion, neither Jesus nor Gautama would find the other’s worldview acceptable. According to Christ, Buddha would certainly *not* have been spiritually enlightened—far from it. His rejection of a creator God would classify him as a pagan unbeliever, however adept he was at philosophical speculation. “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God” (Ps. 14:1). Such a man would need repentance and faith in the one true God (Jn. 17:3). In other words, Jesus’ view of Buddha is that he would require salvation—just like everyone else.

And conversely, Buddha would have no need for Christ as Savior, for Buddha taught total, unswerving self-reliance. Compare this with Jeremiah 17:5—“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.” Thus, in discussing Buddhism’s appeal to modern man, Stephen Neill is correct in observing that this appeal is based squarely upon prideful self-sufficiency:

**For the modern man one of the most attractive things in this scheme is that in it he is entirely cast back upon himself. ‘Therefore, O Ananda, take the self as a lamp; take**

**the self as a refuge. Betake yourselves to no external refuges. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. Look not for refuge to anyone besides yourself. Work out your own salvation with diligence.’ So the Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta, one of the most famous of Buddhist classics....The Buddha attained to enlightenment by his own intense concentration; he called in no help from any god or savior. So it must be with the disciple. God has been abolished, at least as far as any possibility of a practical relationship to him is concerned. There is no hope for a man outside of himself—or rather in his inner apprehension of the meaning of the Buddha, the Law and the Order. ‘Man for himself.’ That is the modern mood. The last thing that a modern man desires is to be told that he needs to be saved, or that he requires the help of a savior.... So naturally Buddhism has attractive power....** <sup>24</sup>

Whereas Theravada views the Buddha as an enlightened man (more enlightened, no doubt, than the biblical Christ, but still a man), Mahayanists have placed Buddha on the level of a divine being who rivals Christ in his deity, although still falling far short of the biblical concept.

The Mahayana text Matrceta Satapancasatkastotra I, 2-4 states of Buddha:

**To go to him for refuge, to praise and to honor him, to abide in his religion, that is fit for those with sense. The only Protector, he is without faults or their residues; The all-knowing, he has all the virtues, and that without fail. For even the spiteful cannot find with any justice any fault in the Lord—in his thought, words or deeds.** <sup>25</sup>

The Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika) says of him “He thus becomes the Saviour of the world with its Gods” (XXIV, 17). <sup>26</sup>

Finally, in the area of miraculous, we find another disagreement with Christian faith: “It may be fairly said that Buddhism is not a miraculous religion in the sense that none of its central doctrines depend on miracles.” <sup>27</sup>

By contrast, how many Christological themes or doctrines depend upon the miraculous? Messianic prophecy (Isa. 9:6; Ps. 22), the incarnation (Phil. 2), virgin birth (Mt. 1:25), Christ’s miracles as proof of his Messiahship (Mt. 8:15-17), the miracles associated with the crucifixion (Mt. 27:50-53), resurrection (Lk. 24:36-39) and atonement (e.g., the miracle of regeneration), the ascension (Acts 1:9-10), the second coming (Mt. 24), etc. The differences are again striking.

In conclusion, Buddha and Jesus are not just a little bit short of being friends. The suffering and exaltation of Christ is hardly equivalent to the serene peacefulness of the Buddha entering nirvana. Jesus came to save the world, not himself (Jn. 12:27). Indeed, Jesus said, “He that would save his life will lose it” (Mt. 16:25). He obeyed and glorified the very God whom Buddha contentedly rejected (Jn. 17:4).

#### **Footnotes:**

24. Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (2nd ed.) (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1970),, p. 118-119.

25. Edward Conze et al. (eds.), *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (NY: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1954), p. 194.

26. Ibid.

27. Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. I. (NY: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 325.