

OVERVIEW OF BUDDHISM

According to a 1990 Census, over 800,000 Americans point to Japan as their nation of origin. The vast majority of these people are professing Buddhists. At the same time thousands of non-Asian North Americans have adopted Buddhism as their religion. Due in part to their inclusiveness and support of the interfaith movement, Buddhism has become very popular. Yet, many Christians are woefully uninformed as to what the Buddhists actually believe. Christian leaders, instead of boldly proclaiming the gospel of Christ, have joined the ranks of the "enlightened", and are teaching their congregations that there should be harmony and cooperation between Buddhist doctrine and the Christian faith. If you study what Buddhism teaches, however, you must conclude that there can be no harmony between the two. They are opposite in almost every way and one would have to deny Christ and the Bible in order to embrace Buddhism as a religion that also leads to God and salvation. Here we will examine these vast differences, compare Buddhism with the truth of the Bible, and provide information that will help you share the message of Christ with Buddhists.

TIPS FOR SHARING THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST WITH BUDDHISTS

When sharing your faith with a Buddhist, remember that there are many different

branches of Buddhism. While they all share many of the same core beliefs, they can vary greatly in other beliefs and some may involve more animistic superstitions than others. The Buddha taught that speculation about spiritual beings hinders one from achieving spiritual enlightenment, however, many Buddhist groups are very concerned with appeasing evil spirits and are very much enslaved by spiritual bondage. Though the different sects within Buddhism may differ in beliefs, all of their beliefs conflict in every way with the teachings of Christ. Below are some tips to keep in mind when sharing the Bible and the message of Christ with Buddhists.

1. Certain religious terms or phrases that you might use while witnessing to a Buddhist may have a completely different meaning to a person of a different heritage, culture, or belief system. For example, you wouldn't want to suggest to a Buddhist without much explanation that they should accept Christ and be 'born again'. To the buddhist, being born again equals a failure. Buddhism teaches that through a cycle of rebirths you can reach Nirvana, therefore being born again may confuse them and give them a negative view of what accepting Christ means. You might use the term 'new birth'. Explain to them that by accepting Christ we are born as a new person spiritually and are saved eternally. It isn't a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one.
2. Also, be careful when explaining that we are saved through grace. The Buddhist has been taught that you must work for anything good. They feel to attain something as desired as nirvana, one must practice meditation, observe the required rituals, live a life free from wrong desires and actions, and perform many other traditions and works. The idea that salvation is a free gift will seem very foreign to them and perhaps too simplistic and illogical. It will take time for them to understand God's love and forgiveness, and to accept their own inability to resist sin. Explain that salvation is not a gift handed out to anyone, there is an action on the part of the seeker, but the value of the gift is found in God's love for us. Spend a lot of time reading the Bible with them to help them understand this concept.
3. When explaining Christ's crucifixion and the role it plays in salvation, don't be surprised if Buddhists find this idea abhorrent. They may ask "How can an all-powerful God allow himself to be killed in such a humiliating way?" There may also be a cultural barrier if the person you're speaking with is of Japanese descent. To them, Jesus' death on the cross possesses none of the qualities they admire in their society, such as serenity, strength, and honor. Point out to them that Christ is a living God and He conquered death. His death paid the price for our sins. Christ died for us because He loves and cares for us. Only a God who has suffered as He had can identify with our inner torments; only a God who really cares for us would allow himself to be so cruelly afflicted; and only a God who truly is God could rise from the dead and give eternal life to those who follow Him. Paul prophesied that some would stumble over the cross in Galatians 5:11. We are also instructed not to be ashamed of it.
4. Buddhists do not believe in heaven or in an eternity anywhere for that matter. They believe that by following the teaching of Buddhism strictly and leading a perfect life they will escape a cycle of rebirths and cease to exist. This end to the soul is called Nirvana. It might seem hard to believe that anyone would look forward to a gift of nothing, but it's important to understand that family traditions, an attachment to earthly pursuits and worldly pleasures, and a strong disbelief in God

can blind them to how much better the hope Christ gives us is. Use your personal experiences and your own life as an example of the hope they can have. But, also keep in mind many Buddhists will look at Christians who are wrapped up in worldly things as an example of Christianity and they may not understand how people so focused on their earthly lives could really believe in a better place. Explain to them that some people have fallen short, while others are true to God's calling, but all who repent and seek God are forgiven. We have a loving God.

5. When witnessing to a Buddhist, be prepared for spiritual warfare! We can always expect to be attacked when we're sharing our faith. Satan never wants to see us succeed. But, spiritual warfare may be especially intense in this case because Buddhists participate in idol worship, the veneration of the spirits of deceased ancestors, and ceremonial rituals for the purpose of appeasing evil spirits. If they are actively interacting with evil spirits, we can expect to be attacked. As Christians, we need not fear evil. Explain to the Buddhist that we don't need to appease evil spirits because we have power over them through Christ. Jesus already won that battle, and we can resist them, and cast them out as Christ did. Use examples from the Gospels of Jesus and His disciples doing just this. I John 4:4 "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them (evil spirits), because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."
6. Most importantly, love them. You have an opportunity to share with them the greatest gift they could ever receive, a relationship with Jesus Christ. Share the love of Christ with them in what you say and how you treat them. They have been deceived and they need your help. In Deuteronomy 10:19 God instructed the

Jews saying, "And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." We should also love those who are different from us while not being afraid or ashamed to share the hope that is within us.

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TIPS FOR WITNESSING TO **BUDDHISTS**



A FACTUAL PRESENTATION OF THE
VIEWS OF BUDDHISM, AND HOW TO
EFFECTIVELY SHARE THE GOSPEL
WITH BUDDHISTS