

**WHO DO THEY SAY THAT HE IS?**  
**#4: Who Do the Buddhists Say That He Is?**  
**July 15-17, 2006**

<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

*John 15:1-8 TNIV*

Introduction: Examining what other religious groups profess about Jesus Christ can help us understand better what we believe about him. Buddhists purport that human beings can achieve divine enlightenment leading to “salvation” by extinguishing desire through self-effort. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that no amount of self-effort can save us.

- I. The Basics of Buddhism
  - A. Devised by Siddhartha Gautama, a Hindu from present day Nepal born about 560 BC.
  - B. Legend holds that Gautama led a sheltered life in the lap of luxury before encountering human suffering and resolving to solve the riddle of life through self-denial, which he accomplished to become Buddha, or “the enlightened one.”
  - C. Buddhism seeks nirvana, the highest degree of God-consciousness where all personal desire is “blown out” and suffering is negated.
  - D. Buddha’s most important teaching was the theory of “the middle way” to salvation defined by “four noble truths:”
    1. Suffering is universal, a part of life.
    2. The cause of suffering is “craving,” or selfish desire that leads to an endless cycle of *tanha* (attachment).
    3. The remedy for suffering is enlightenment leading to the disavowal of cravings and complete detachment.
    4. Craving must be suppressed by following the “middle way” of the noble “eightfold path.”
  - E. The eightfold path is: (1) right understanding, (2) right

aspiration, (3) right speech, (4) right behavior, (5) right occupation, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right meditation.

- F. Buddhism has segmented into a number of branches, including *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, and *Tantrism* (the primary three), all of which profess that the individual who can perfectly follow the eightfold path can end the cycle of reincarnation and achieve a nirvanic nothingness.
- II. Who Do They Say that Jesus Is?
    - A. According to most Buddhist thinkers, Jesus was a great teacher who had achieved a high degree of enlightenment.
    - B. Buddhists teach that Jesus is not unique, and that other equal teachers have existed throughout history.
    - C. Buddhism professes Jesus to have been a lesser teacher than Buddha, certainly not “*the* enlightened one.”
    - D. Many Buddhist scholars teach that Jesus was a master of the middle way, and that any claims to divinity on his part are attributed to his followers.
    - E. Buddhism does not confess the existence of a personal God who is omniscient and omnipotent, so it would be impossible for there to be a personal incarnation of God.
  - III. Who Do We Say That He Is?
    - A. We agree with Buddhists that Jesus was a great teacher who counseled self-denial.
    - B. But Christians go much further than do Buddhists by confessing Jesus as the unique Son of the one, true, living God, who died to save humanity from sin (Matthew 4:33, John 1:34, Romans 5:6-8).
    - C. We believe that Jesus called us to deny ourselves for the sake of attachment to Him, not for detachment.

[Jesus said,] “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”  
*Luke 9:23*
    - D. We believe that Jesus came as God incarnate so that we could have full lives in this world and the next.

[Jesus said,] “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” *John 10:10b*
    - E. We believe that self-effort is futile apart from attachment to Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: It is no coincidence that Jesus tells us He is “the way” in God’s Word, the Bible. Buddhism is a good human philosophy. Biblical faith is far more: it is God’s way of remaking us for Him.