

Bible Special 06-06-06a

This is the 6th of June, 2006, the fated and dreaded 666, and as Elizabeth pointed out, as of 6 o'clock and 6 minutes and 6 seconds and all that, just nothing happened, because of course the number of the beast has nothing to do with the date, but people go strange over superstitions. As much as we claim to be scientific, it doesn't seem to work out that way. But we are continuing tonight our study on the truth of Christianity, Biblical Christianity, why it is our choice and what the contrast is with other religions.

It is not possible to prove Christianity to be correct by any human argumentation. This is the work of God's Holy Spirit. He comes and convinces each one of us as human beings of sin, righteousness and judgment, and it is the response or the reaction at the point of that conviction that determines whether or not we end up as a part of the eternally saved or the eternally condemned.

We should, however, be able to give good reasons why our faith is valid. They're not proofs, but they are evidences, they are characteristics, they make sense, they are reasonable to reasonable people, and there are unique features of Christianity, there are unique features of the Bible that we have been discussing. As we begin our study tonight, let's take a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts, and ask God that the ministry of His Holy Spirit will be effective for us as a group and individually.

Shall we pray? Father, it is a blessing and an encouragement to have the opportunity to set aside the cares and the tasks and the responsibilities of the day and refresh ourselves, refresh our souls through the nourishment that only Your Word can provide. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You for the truth of His person, the truth of His work.

We thank You for the accurate and trustworthy record of Him and His work in the Scriptures, and we thank You that through Him, through His work, and through Your love for us, we can be saved from our lost and hopeless condition. We ask Your blessing on us as we evaluate our faith in comparison to the alternatives and the religions that the world seeks out, the deceptions that Satan has put forth and has fostered in the world, and we pray that in so doing, we will not lose sight of that all-important truth of Your Word, which is profitable for so many things in our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We introduced the idea of our Christianity, the essential truths of Christianity, under the heading of 1 Corinthians 15, 3 and 4, which is a distillation and an encapsulation of much greater and more comprehensive principles. But what are the three things that distinguish Orthodox Christianity? This is review and quiz.

Walk into the room and the first thing you do is get a quiz. What are the three things that distinguish biblical Christianity as we find them in 1 Corinthians 15? The first is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. First and foremost, that's why it's Christianity and not something

else-ianity, because it's all about the person and work of Christ.

We have, secondly, what? The lost and hopeless condition of man, the sin that has entered the world, death by sin, death passed upon all men, all have sinned, Romans. And thirdly, what is the third element? I like having three elements in our Orthodox Christianity. You have Christ, you have man, and then what? It is the Holy Scriptures, the authority and the integrity of the Scriptures.

There is a reason why it doesn't just say Bible on the front of your book there. It says Holy Bible. Holy doesn't mean that it glows in the dark or that it can confer some sort of magic upon us, but what it does mean is that it is set apart.

It is unique. It is divinely inspired. It is God's revelation of Himself to man.

Now, there are those who will begin any discussion with you by saying, well, you know, I don't really accept the Bible as the Word of God. I think it's just Hebrew myths and legends. Well, you can stop right there because and you can confront an atheist or an agnostic or any other naysayer with that initial statement.

If you reject the Bible as God's revelation of Himself, there's no further discussion because nothing you can say regarding God is true unless it comes from the Bible. And if someone rejects the authority and the inspiration of the Bible, if they don't think that it is God's revelation of Himself, you're done. You're all done.

There's no point in any further discussion. If people do not accept the authority of the Scriptures, you might as well save your breath. It's the Bible or nothing.

The Bible is God's complete, connected, comprehensive revelation of Himself, His purpose, His plan and His Son. We know nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ that doesn't come from the Scriptures. It is no accident that there's not a lot of historical record of the Lord Jesus.

There are just a few scattered references in the early historians and even those are often questioned and thought to be later interpolations by Christian copyists who felt like Josephus should have said something or Eusebius should have said something or Tacitus or somebody else should have said something regarding the Bible or regarding Christ. And so they'll question whether there's any record of Jesus at all. Well, this is not an accident.

It's not an argument for the atheist or the agnostic that Jesus must not have existed because there's no record. God intended the Scriptures to be that record. The Scriptures are that record.

People say, well, where are the contemporaneous eyewitnesses of Jesus? Well, let's see. Matthew, Mark, John, Peter, James, Jude, Paul. There's a handful of contemporaneous eyewitnesses.

Oh, well, I don't think that they really wrote their books. Well, again, if you're going to set aside

the evidence and dismiss it based on speculations and based on theories that people have, well, I just don't think Paul wrote all of his letters. I don't think Matthew wrote Matthew.

I don't think John wrote John. I don't think Mark wrote Mark. I don't think Luke knew what he was talking about.

I mean, if you're going to conveniently dismiss all of the eyewitness testimony, then why am I talking to you? What do you want to talk about if you're not going to use the early extant eyewitnesses? Well, we've talked about all this in previous weeks. Last week, we started looking at other religions in comparison to Orthodox Christianity. We spent quite a bit of time on Buddhism.

Now, once again, what is the essence of Christianity? Person and work of Christ. Lost and hopeless condition of man. Authority and integrity of the scriptures.

Buddhism. What's Buddhism about? Do you remember? It was the strangest quote-unquote coincidence because I process dozens and dozens of Dr. Criswell sermons every week. As you know, that's my job.

I can't listen to all of them, so I will occasionally, I'll get three or four going and then I'll just listen to one. The sermon I just happened to listen to today was Dr. Criswell talking about this very subject. He brought up the Buddhists.

He said, what we're going to talk about tonight is comparing Christianity to the religions of the world. Then he began talking about Buddhism. You know what he said? Exactly the same thing we said last week.

Buddhism believes that existence is an illusion and the illusion is perpetuated by people's belief in it. As long as you believe in the illusion, it's sort of like, this would be a similar idea. Have you ever had a really vivid dream and you're in the dream and it just, everything seems real real, full living color, three dimensions, Dolby surround sound.

It's just very vivid and very real. You get the idea that as long as you believe the dream, you can't wake up from it. You have to kind of recognize and say, wait a minute.

I think I'm dreaming here. I need to wake up. Sometimes you know you're dreaming and you know you need to wake up and you start straining.

I'm sure you've done this. I've done this. You know you're in the dream.

You don't want to be in the dream. You want to wake up. You say, wake up, wake up.

It's like you're paralyzed. You try to sit up and you try to move your head. You try to say something.

You try to do something, slap yourself or get yourself awake and it's like you don't have access

to the controls to get yourself awake. Well, this is what Buddhism thinks life is. That in a nutshell is the Buddhist view of life.

You're stuck in the dream and as long as you believe the dream, you can't get out of it. So your efforts in life should be directed through meditation and you know, um, and you're shutting your eyes one thing or another. You want to try to get yourself out of the illusion.

When you reach enlightenment, when you get to a higher state of consciousness, you'll think your way out of the dream. You'll think your way out of the illusion. That's Buddhism.

Buddhism has the four noble truths. Do you remember what they are? Life is suffering. Life is pain.

Life is hard and then you die. That's truth number one of Buddhism. Truth number two, why is life full of misery and suffering? Because you want stuff.

If you could get out of wanting stuff, this is noble truth number three. If you could quit wanting stuff, you're suffering and your misery would cease. And number four, how do you get rid of these cravings? How do you get rid of your covetous, desirous, grasping nature? How do you eliminate that out of your psyche and out of your mind so that you can climb up out of the illusion and get to the reality? How do you do it? Well, you've got to buy the big book.

You've got the little four noble truths, but truth number four is you've got to have the eightfold path. The noble eightfold path, all of this comes from Gautama, what's his name that they call the Buddha. What is the noble eightfold path? You've got to have some right things.

You've got to develop these by meditation. I'm going to give these to you quickly because we're not interested in becoming Buddhists, but you need to know what they think and what they believe. And I'll give you a very simple summary when we're done here and we'll move on to our other religions.

Alright, what are the four noble truths? Life is what? Suffering. Why do we suffer? We want stuff. How can you stop suffering? Quit wanting stuff.

How can you quit wanting stuff? Eightfold path. You've got to follow the eightfold path. Follow the eightfold path, you'll quit wanting stuff, you won't be miserable, you'll rise to the top and pop right out of the illusion and join with whatever it is that's beyond.

So, what is the eightfold path? This would be handy to know. I'm thinking, you know, this Buddhism, I know a Buddhist, real nice person, maybe Buddhism is the way to go. So, what is the eightfold path? If the eightfold path is good, if the eightfold path produces results, then hey, maybe Buddhism is a viable philosophy.

Well, number one of the eightfold path, you have to have a right view. You've got to get your perspective straightened out. You've got to see things right.

Secondly, you've got to have a right intention. Your goals have to be good. You start by seeing things through.

You recognize that, well, this task I'm working on, it's imperfect, it's transient, it's impermanent, it's vapor anyway. Everything under the sun is vapor. Sort of a little biblical concept there.

Having a right view, recognizing, well, don't get too invested in this because it's all going to turn to dust anyway. You know the song, Dust in the Wind? Everything is dust in the wind. All we are is dust in the wind.

Well, that's like number one of the eightfold path. Don't get wrapped up in it. It doesn't matter.

That's another song. Imperfect nature of worldly objects and ideas. It's just not worth worrying over.

What you've got to concentrate on is karma, fate. What will be will be. Kesarakarma.

That's number one. You've got to distance yourself from reality a little bit because it doesn't mean much. Then your right intention is number two.

Number one is what do you recognize? What is your process of cognition? What do you treat as reality and as important? Secondly, what are your intentions? This is your chooser. What are you going to choose to do? Somebody comes up and they're arguing with you. Somebody comes up and they want something and you don't want to comply.

Somebody has an expectation. Somebody has a commitment that they want from you. You perceive that.

You say, ah, this person and their commitment, their desire, that's all going to blow away in the dust, so I'm not too concerned about it. What is my choice going to be? Number two, right intention. What is the mental energy I'm going to expend on this problem? How much of a commitment am I going to make? That's number two.

Right view, right intention. That's what you have to develop as a Buddhist. Number three, right speech.

Once you have perceived everything and you've figured out what you're going to do about it, what are you going to say? Well, you and the horse you rode in on can just go away. I totally don't care about what you're wanting from me, but I'm not going to say that because that's not a right speech. Right speech is something that needs to conform to an ethical standard.

I want this speech to be moral and disciplined and words can save lives. You speak, you see a guy gasping and twitching and you call 911, you're speaking some right words that are going to save somebody's life. Even though you recognize, well, he's dust and he's just going to be dust sooner if I don't call and that sort of thing.

But I have the intention, I'll do a good deed, I make the call, I have right speech. You abstain from false speech. Don't bear false witness.

That's an ethical standard. You abstain from slanderous speech. It doesn't gain me or anybody else anything.

It's bad karma to go around bad-mouthing people, so I'm going to not do it. And I'm going to refrain from offense and harshness. I don't want to disturb the little karmic waves around other people, so I'm going to keep a rein on my tongue.

And I'm not going to engage in idle chatter. Does any of this sound familiar? Does the Bible talk about any of these principles? Everything we've covered so far, are we to have a right perspective of the world as Christians? To recognize what's important and what's not? What is transient and temporary and part of this earth and what is permanent and eternal? Lay not up for yourself treasure on earth, lay up for yourself treasure in heaven. That's a biblical concept, isn't it? So Buddhism is kind of hooking in to a truth that is in fact a biblical eternal truth.

How about right intention? How about volition? The choices that I make, am I responsible and accountable? Should they conform to a biblical standard as a believer? Yeah, so you say, hey, this Buddhism is just kind of a warmed over Christianity. Maybe it's a good alternative. Right speech? Buddhists say, I've got to control my tongue, say the right things, refrain from saying the wrong things.

Is that a biblical concept? So far, I have no argument with Buddhism. Do you? I think it's great if people are going to control their tongue, have right perceptions and right intentions. Sounds great to me.

How about number four? Number four on the eightfold path, the noble eightfold path is right action. Got to do the right thing. So your body is your natural means of expression.

So this is deeds that involve bodily actions. What am I going to carry? What am I going to bring? What am I going to accomplish? So I've got to abstain from harming my fellow sentient beings. I don't want to inflict injury.

I don't want to do something whether I'm driving or whether I'm doing any other kind of activity. If I'm just swinging a hammer, I want to be careful not to mash the other guy's thumb. I want to abstain from taking life.

I want to abstain from taking what someone doesn't give me. In other words, don't kill, don't steal. This is under the right action, number four of the noble eightfold path.

Don't kill, don't steal. Abstain from sexual misconduct falls under this. Buddhists say don't fornicate.

Don't adulterate. Don't perversify. Don't do perverted things.

Perversify is not a word by the way. Right action means act kindly, be compassionate, be honest, respect the rights and the property of others. Keep your physical relationships within the bounds of morality and good taste.

Be harmless to others. Don't take advantage of others. Don't lead others on.

Don't run around as a male deflowering young maidens and leaving them cast aside. It's moral, it's ethical. Right actions.

Number five, the right livelihood. Buddhists believe you should earn your living in a righteous way. Have a wholesome productive mode of employment.

Your wealth, your goods, your possessions should be gained lawfully and peacefully. The Buddha, old Gautama, talked about four activities that harm other beings and should be avoided. Don't be an arms dealer.

Don't run a gun shop. Don't sell weapons to others. Don't sell spears, don't sell swords, don't sell clubs or any other implements that could harm others.

Don't be a dealer of living beings. Buddhists don't think you ought to trade animals. They don't think you should be involved in trafficking in animals, especially not humans, in terms of slavery, but you shouldn't raise animals for slaughter.

You shouldn't be involved in prostitution. You shouldn't be involved in slavery. This is a Buddhist belief that goes way back.

You shouldn't work in meat production or butchery, because once again, you're harming living things. Not good. And you should not sell anything like a drug, or any sort of weed you chew, or smoke, or ingest, or shoot up with, or anything else.

Buddhists say, bad, don't do it. Any other occupation that would violate the principles of right speech or right action, don't do it. It's one of the reasons you don't find very many Buddhist actors, because you have to engage in speech that's not considered right.

You have to engage in speech that's not considered right. You're being deceptive. You're putting on, and the whole lifestyle associated with that job is against the principles of Buddhism.

Number seven of the eightfold path. Wait a minute. I skipped six.

Boy, be bad to only have seven of your eightfold path. You'd never get your karma right, would you? Number six, right effort. Now, keep in mind, these are not necessarily discrete and separate.

They overlap, they blend into one another, and you don't do them sequentially. You don't start out with saying, well, I'm going to do everything to get my right perception. Then I'm going to

do everything to get my right intention.

These all are supposed to develop simultaneously. You build all of them up. So, right effort, you kind of have to have this for all of your other noble principles to work.

You've got to put effort into your intention. You've got to put effort into your vocation and all of these other things. So, right effort, you've got to manage your mental energy.

You do this, don't you? If you're in school or you're in a job, you say, you know, I've only got so much time in the day. I've only got so much energy in my brain. I've got to prioritize.

I've got to manage my mental effort. Now, so far, do we have any argument with Buddhism? Don't steal. Don't do all of these bad things.

Do these positive things. Be a blessing to others, basically. Improve yourself.

Be a better person. I have no argument with anything they've said thus far. Do you? Right effort.

Once again, you prevent the arising of unwholesome states. You try to suppress something that's coming up that's unwholesome, that's going to screw up your other noble path attributes. You abandon any unwholesome states that you find have already arisen.

You suddenly say, wait a minute, I've got a bad action going on here. I'm in a bad vocation. I've got a bad effort going on.

Well, you get rid of that. And if you identify a wholesome state, something that contributes to all of your other right path stuff, well, you pursue that. Well, what does the Bible say? Eschew that which is evil.

Hold fast to that which is good. Whatsoever things are good, noble, lovely, pure, right, good report, think on these things. Depart from evil.

Hold fast to what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God? I mean, this just tracks right along with our biblical concepts, doesn't it? And then number seven is right mindfulness. Now, we already talked about having right perceptions, but what do you do with the perceptions once they're in there? So, you see things as they are with clear consciousness.

This goes back to your number one deal. But now, what is your interpretation? Remember, in Scripture, what do we do? We observe what's in the Scripture. Then what do we do? What's the second step? Observe, then what? Interpret.

Figure out, so what? What does that mean? What is the truth contained in that passage or that saying or whatever, right? Once you figure out the interpretation, then what do we do? Apply. If this is what the Word of God says, if this is what the Word of God means, then what should I

do? What should I think? What kind of person should I be? Good, solid procedure, right? That's what the Buddhists want to do. I perceive things.

I make sure I've got a good interpretation here. I have a right mind. Good interpretation of what I observe and what I'm, how can you manage your mental energy and pursue right efforts and diminish and get rid of bad efforts unless you've got a right mind.

This is what I would call, you remember the three things I suggested to you for identifying your thinking? What are the three parts that I have suggested to you comprise human thinking? You've got goals, values, and priorities, right? As near as I can tell, this pretty well comprehends what goes on in our mind. So, this right mindfulness, this is values, isn't it? You perceive things and you do something and you say, well, how good or how bad is that? You've got to have a good set of values. That's what number seven is, good values.

And then finally, number eight is right concentration. You've got to develop the mental force that you have when you're awake that lets you concentrate, that makes you single-minded. It's wholesome concentration.

I can dedicate myself. I can commit myself. I can pursue a thing to its completion.

Once I've got my other stuff figured out, I've perceived correctly, I've thought about it correctly, I've decided what I'm going to say and what I'm going to think and what I'm going to do correctly, what my vocation is going to be. Now, I commit to that. I push through and finish what I start.

I persist. I endure. Is persistence and endurance a biblical principle? Do you have need of patience? Do you have need of endurance so that after you've suffered, you receive the promise? Of course.

There's not a thing in these eightfold path statements that conflicts with the Bible, not a one. So, what's the difference? Why aren't we Buddhists? Have you got the answer yet? You've got your right thinking and your right perception and your right motivation and your right speech all lined up. How come we're not Buddhists? It's easy to line this out as a philosophy and as a goal of life, right? So, I just have one question for you and it's a single word.

How? Now, I'm not speaking Indian. How? How do you bring about the fulfillment of this eightfold path? Where does the power come from to get your right view and your right intentions lined up? You'd have to be basically an unflawed, undamaged, uncorrupted person to be able to set out to do these things and not be tripped up by a corrupt nature, right? Because my nature doesn't want to have a right view. The view that appeals to me is the view that puts Sam up here and everybody else down here.

The view that appeals to me is the one that gratifies me. Where does my pleasure come from? Where does my satisfaction come from? That's my right view in my fallen nature and there is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. You don't get that

in Buddhism.

How do you cultivate a right view? Oh, just meditate. I'm meditating with a broken machine. This is like saying, if you want to get from here to Denton in 30 minutes, drive really, really fast.

Okay, I hop in my 77 Volkswagen bus and I'm going to try to get to Denton in half an hour. It's not going to happen. Why? My bus will not go that fast and I'm here to tell you that the human soul in its lost and hopeless condition, number two of Orthodox Christianity, cannot on its own develop a right view.

You can't do it. You can't get a right intention. You can't discipline and bridle your tongue.

What does James say about the tongue? It's like a fire and it's set on fire by the flames of hell. Who in this world in their own steam and their own energy is going to bring under control the fire of hell that's burning in their mouth? You want to say something, you're going to say it. You want to have a bad thought, you're going to have it.

Right actions, right livelihood, right efforts, right mindfulness, right concentration. It sounds great, it's a noble dream, but the wherewithal to accomplish it isn't present. Remember what Paul says in Romans chapter 7? What I ought to do, I clearly identify, but the means to carry it out, I don't find it in myself.

Who will deliver me from this body of death? I have the will to do what's right, but this is like people who get grossly overweight and decide, I've seen these people on TV, they're like five, six hundred pounds, they say, I've got to lose weight, but they don't have the willpower to do it. No matter what they try, they can't get it accomplished. This is the flaw in Buddhism.

It has a noble goal, but it gives you no means. There is no power to make this happen. We've got to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll remind ourselves of where that power is.