

Confession

Tiger Woods' Buddhist Confession

As part of his public confession last Friday, Tiger Woods discussed his religious background. He said, "I have a lot of work to do, and I intend to dedicate myself to doing it. Part of following this path for me is Buddhism, which my mother taught me at a young age. People probably don't realize it, but I was raised a Buddhist, and I actively practiced my faith from childhood until I drifted away from it in recent years. Buddhism teaches that a craving for things outside ourselves causes an unhappy and pointless search for security. It teaches me to stop following every impulse and to learn restraint. Obviously I lost track of what I was taught."

The two key sentences are these: "Buddhism teaches that a craving for things outside ourselves causes an unhappy and pointless search for security. It teaches me to stop following every impulse and to learn restraint."

As Professor Stephen Prothero of Boston University affirmed, this is an accurate distillation of Buddhist beliefs. In his words: "In an elegant distillation of the Buddha's dharma (teaching), Woods said, "Buddhism teaches that a craving for things outside ourselves causes an unhappy and pointless search for security." Here he is obviously describing his craving for sexual encounters with beautiful women. But he is also describing our collective obsession with the next new thing."



Buddhism teaches the aim of emptying the self of all desire. As Prothero observes, "Buddhists observe that suffering arises from a 12-fold chain of interlocking causes and effects. Among these causes is craving. We crave this woman or that car because we think that getting her or it will make us happy. But this craving only ties us into an unending cycle of misery, because even if we get what we want there is always something more to crave – another woman or another man, a faster car or a bigger house."

Professor Prothero points to the statement by Tiger Woods as distinctive from previous apologies specifically because Woods cited a Buddhist rationale, rather than a Christian logic. Prothero sees this as evidence of America's religious diversity and of the need for religious literacy in order to understand each other.

From an Evangelical perspective, the statement by Tiger Woods points to the radical distinction between Christianity and Buddhism -- between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the dharma of the Buddha.

Here is some further insight into the differences between Christianity and Buddhism from Southern Seminary President, Albert Mohler:

Christianity speaks honestly of desire and affirm that wrongful desires can and do lead to sin, destruction, and death. Nevertheless, Christianity does not teach that all desire is wrong. Indeed, the Bible affirms that God made us to desire Him. Even in our sinful state, something within us cries out for our need -- and desire -- for divine forgiveness and redemption.

Christianity does not teach that we should (or could) empty ourselves of all desire, but rather that we should desire the salvation that Christ alone has accomplished for us -- the salvation that leads to divine forgiveness and the restoration of relationship we should surely desire. Once we know that salvation, our desire for God is only increased and pointed to eternity.

Tiger Woods made a remarkable statement of confession. Even as it was couched in the language of the recovery movement and coached by public relation professionals, it should be taken at face value. But the most remarkable aspect of his confession is its Buddhist shape. American Christians should look at those words with care.

A Christian looking at those words sees just how distant they are from the Gospel. The distinction between the Christian and Buddhist worldviews is laid bare for all to see. Tiger Woods should be taken at his word when he grounds his apology and confession in Buddhism. Evangelical Christians should see this as further reason to pray for Tiger Woods. We should respect the integrity and honesty of his statement, but hope and pray that he will one day come to know the salvation and forgiveness of sin that comes only through faith in Christ. We believe that he will not find salvation in renouncing all desire. We would hope instead that he might hear the Gospel and desire Christ.

WARM-UP

1. When you were growing up, what incident do you remember where you misbehaved and had to make a confession?

WORKOUT

1. What are your first impressions of Tiger's press conference and confession?
2. What is the gospel? How would this be "good news" if Tiger would turn from Buddhism and convert to Christianity?
3. What is the difference between Christianity and Buddhism based upon this blog?