

Questions and Answers about Religion

(An adapted version of Edmund Amundsen's Tibetan Catechism - also referred to as the "Short Catechism")

1. Q: Who is God?

Ans: God is the one who created the heavens (i.e. outer space), the earth, mankind and all the different creatures. God is almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is the immeasurably great eternal Spirit and is without birth or death.

2. Q: How were the heavens and the earth created?

Ans: These were created by God at his command (he created them out of nothing). There was no pre-existing material. First, he created the heavens and the earth. Then he created light. On the second day, he created the sky. On the third day, he gathered the waters together into seas and dry land appeared. On the dry land, different kinds of plants and trees were created. On the fourth day, God created the sun, the moon and the stars. On the fifth day, he created the fish and other sea creatures in the oceans, and all the different kinds of birds in the sky. On the sixth day, God created different kinds of land animals and then he created man.

3. Q: How did God create man?

Ans: He created man from the soil. After he created man, he breathed life into his nostrils and the man became alive.

4. Q: Who were the first two people that God created?

Ans: He created a man that he called Adam and a woman that he named as Eve. God commanded them to rule over all the earth and all the creatures on it.

5. Q: Were Adam and Eve the ancestral parents of us all?

Ans: Yes. They were the first parents of all mankind on this earth. Because of the difference in climatic conditions in each country, people's complexions are not the same. After God created everything, he declared that everything he had made was very good.

6. Q: What did God do on the seventh day?

Ans: On the seventh day, he rested and did not do any work. He also declared it to be a special day (i.e. he blessed it).

7. Q: So, does that mean we should not do any work on Sundays?

Ans: That is correct. God commanded all people to stop their regular work and rest. One reason for doing this is that on this special day people can gather together and worship him.

The perfect couple fell under the power of sin

8. Q: If God had created the two good people without sin, then how did they fall into sin?

Ans: The devil deceived these two people and they decided to disobey God's instructions. As a consequence, sin was generated and the good hearts of these two people became self centered (i.e. self cherishing or evil). Another consequence of sin was that pain, suffering and death came into the world.

9. Q: Was there no suffering at all before Adam and Eve fell into sin?

Ans: No, there was no suffering. All evil is due to sin.

10. Q: If pain, sickness, death and all suffering are a consequence of sin, then are they also a punishment?

Ans: Yes, that is correct.

11. Q: Is there any other punishment for sin?

Ans: Yes there is. Human beings no longer have a mind that is faultless. The excellent and virtuous mind was lost (when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instruction in the Garden of Eden). The mind that we have now is obscured by ignorance and sin.

12. Q: Are all evil consequences due to the sin of our first parents?

Ans: Yes, that is correct.

13. Q: Then what will happen if we commit sin?

Ans: Not only will we have have much suffering in this world but, after we die, we will suffer without end.

The most excellent (holy) Ten Commandments (abridged)

[See Exodus 20:2 in the Old Testament]

Sin

14. Q: Please tell me, what is sin in reality?

Ans: Sin is failing to obey God's instructions (or commandments). God gave the commandments in order to benefit mankind and to protect us from evil.

15. Q: What do God's commandments tell us?

Ans: God gave his prophet Moses the following ten commandments:

(1) I am your God. It is inappropriate for you to have idols [i.e. it is not acceptable].

- (2) Do not make an idol of any creature that is in the sky above, on the earth below, or underneath the water. Do not offer worship to them.
- (3) Do not call on the name of your God (Yaweh) thoughtlessly.
- (4) Keep the Sabbath day (Sunday) holy (special).
- (5) Respect your parents.
- (6) Do not kill a human being.
- (7) Do not commit adultery.
- (8) Do not steal.
- (9) Do not tell lies about others and act as a false witness.
- (10) Do not desire those things that belong to others.

A New Commandment which incorporates the Ten Commandments

Jesus said, “Now I give you a new commandment, which is that you should love one another.” John 13:34.

16. Q: How are the Ten Commandments incorporated into this New Commandment?

Ans: If you love God, then you will delight in worshipping him and in obeying his commandments.

If you love other people, then you will love and respect your parents.

If you love others, you will not want to kill anyone.

You will refrain from sexual sin.

You will not want to steal.

You will not give false witness.

You will not want to harm others nor covet their belongings.

Therefore, this is why it is said that all the commandments are included in this one new commandment which says “You must love others”.

All-pervading sin

17. Q: Is it sin if we do not love God and fail to love other people?

Ans: Yes, it is sin.

18. Q: If this is the case, does this mean we are all sinners?

Ans: Yes, that is correct. We are all sinners and are (therefore) deserving of the Lord’s punishment. Moreover, it is completely impossible for us to deliver ourselves from the power of sin.

19. Q: If we do lots of meritorious actions, will our sins be cleansed?

Ans: Even if we do virtuous deeds all our life, we cannot say they are meritorious actions. Good deeds are actions that God told me to do. If I fail to do such

actions, it is sin. Moreover, today's good actions will not be able to cleanse the non-virtuous actions of yesterday. If a sin is committed only once, it cannot be cleared away even by a thousand 'virtuous' actions.

20. Q: Can sin be cleansed by the sowing of many prayers?

Ans: It is good to pray but when you pray, you should not think that you are accumulating merits. Similarly, even if you pray fervently, sin cannot be cleared away as a consequence of your effort.

21. Q: Can sin be cleansed by prostrating to idols and by raising many prayer flags?

Ans: Man-made objects do not possess the attribute to cleanse sin.

22. Q: Can we attain salvation by following God's Ten Commandments?

Ans: Due to the fact that we cannot obey God's Ten Commandments faultlessly, it is not possible for us to attain deliverance from the power of sin by our own efforts.

23. Q: Then do we have no alternative?

Ans: No, we do not. We can never deliver ourselves from the power of sin.

God's great salvation

24. Q: Then how can we ever become free from the punishment of sin?

Ans: On the very day that the first two people fell under the power of sin, God promised he would send a Saviour.

25. Q: Well then, has God sent the Saviour that he promised?

Ans: Just over 2,000 years ago God sent his promised Saviour Jesus to this earth.

26. Q: What is the meaning of name Jesus?

Ans: The name Jesus means Saviour.

27. Q: How did Jesus enter our world?

Ans: A young girl named Mary was overshadowed (pervaded) by the Holy Spirit and nine months later she gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus.

28. Q: In what country was he born?

Ans: He was born in the province of Judea in a Jewish town called Bethlehem.

29. Q: Did Jesus have sin?

Ans: No, not at all.

30. Q: When Jesus was living in the world, what did he do?

Ans: He lived with his mother Mary and step-father Joseph until the age of 30. And he helped them as much as he could.

31. Q: What kind of work did Joseph do on a regular basis?

Ans: He was a carpenter.

32. Q: When Jesus lived in this world, was he poor?

Ans: Jesus was not a wealthy person. He and his family would have lived a simple life similar to other families that have limited resources.

33. Q: What did Jesus do after the age of 30?

Ans: He travelled throughout the provinces where Jews lived and taught everyone who would listen about the true and living God.

34. Q: If he was poor, from where did he get his remarkable knowledge (and abilities)?

Ans: Although he was born a human being, he was also God.

35. Q: I understand that when people looked at Jesus, they did not see an emanation (i.e. a mere appearance) of a man but they saw an actual human being. But was Jesus also God?

Ans: Yes. Jesus was also God, but he did not have man's obscured and sinful mind. The most high God took human form and so Jesus was both God and man.

Definite miraculous signs regarding Jesus' life and death

36. Q: How can we know if Jesus is God?

Ans: We can know that Jesus is God if we look at his wonderful works that he did when he was in the world.

37. Q: What wondrous works did Jesus do?

Ans: (1) When he was only twelve years old, he debated with the learned Jewish religious teachers in their temple and he also taught them. They were all amazed at Jesus' wisdom and his replies to their questions. [Luke 2: 41-52]

(2) In the town of Cana Jesus turned water into wine. [John 2:23]

(3) The two brothers, Peter and Andrew, fished all night but they did not catch any fish. When the sun came up, Jesus called out to them and said, "Throw your net into the water. Now you will get some fish." Peter replied, "We have not caught any fish all night, nevertheless I will throw the net into the water as you have commanded." So they did what Jesus had told them to do. Immediately, they caught so many fish and the boat was filled to overflowing with fish. [Luke 5:1]

(4) Jesus gave a command to a huge storm. He told the wind and waves to stop. Immediately the wind stopped and the lake became calm. [Luke 8:22]

(5) He also raised a dead girl to life. [Luke 8:41]

(6) A man named Lazarus died and he was buried in a tomb for about four days. When Jesus arrived at the tomb, he raised Lazarus to life again. [John 11:1]

(7) On one occasion, 5,000 people gathered to hear Jesus teach. It was a solitary place and after a while the crowds became very hungry. But there were no towns or villages from which they could buy food. So Jesus fed all those people from only five small loaves of bread and two fish. All the people ate until they were completely full. After that, all the leftover food was gathered and twelve large baskets were filled with those leftovers. [Matthew 14:15]

(8) Jesus walked on top of the surface of Lake Galilee. [Matthew 14:22]

(9) He set many people free who were afflicted by evil spirits and he expelled all those unclean spirits. [Mark 9:17]

(10) Jesus healed many people who were inflicted by various illnesses.

(11) When Jesus died on the cross he died in our place. It was for our benefit that he offered up his life as a sacrifice. On the third day, he rose from the dead. [Matthew 27, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20]

(12) After rising from the dead, more than 500 people saw him.

(13) When forty days had passed, Jesus ascended into the heavens (the sky). Many people saw this happen.

(14) Before ascending to heaven, Jesus spoke to his disciples. (They understood the essence of his teaching to be like this). No matter what race one belongs to in this world, if a person puts his faith in God [by taking refuge in Jesus Christ] and receives baptism, that person will be saved. But whosoever does not have faith will incur punishment.

38. Q: Did Jesus' disciples obey his commands?

Ans: Yes, they did. Now this true teaching (about Jesus) is spreading all over the world. We ourselves can see that this is really happening. The evidence for this is seen everywhere.

39. Q: Is there any other sign?

Ans: Yes there is. Jesus said: "People who really want to do God's will know that my teaching comes from God." (John 7:17)

A brief explanation of what it means to do God's will

40. Q: What does it mean to do God's will?

Ans: God wants us to take refuge in the Saviour Jesus Christ and to put our trust in him. God commissioned him (to come to earth for our benefit) [John 6:40 and 3:16]

41. Q: How do we take refuge in him?

Ans: Here is an example: when a chicken sees a vulture coming, the chicken quickly hides under the mother hen's wing. Evil spirits are our enemy. In order to be set free from their power, it is necessary we take refuge in Jesus Christ.

42. Q: What does it mean to be "under the power of evil spirits"?

Ans: It is similar to a slave who is under the power of his master. Whatever the master tells him to do, he must do. And wherever he is told to go, he must go. In a

similar way, if people are under the power of evil spirits, they sin and do non-virtuous deeds. They behave in accordance with what the evil spirits direct them to do.

43. Q: If we abandon sinful acts and refuse to placate evil spirits and - if we - like a chicken hiding under the hen's wing take refuge in the Saviour Jesus, will Jesus protect us and guide us?

Ans: Yes, he will. Like a hen hides its chicken under her wings, the Saviour Jesus will never reject us. [John 6:37]

44. Q: If we believe in Jesus like this will there be any benefit?

Ans: Not only will we be forgiven and set free from the power of evil spirits and non-virtue but our mind will become peaceful (filled with peace) and we will have confidence that after we die we will go to heaven. In addition, the Holy Spirit will abide in us and we will receive great power and strength from him. Moreover, our mind will be filled with pure motivations and we will become recipients of indestructible eternal life.

45. Q: For what reason is the Holy Spirit given?

Ans: The Holy Spirit gives power and strength to those who trust in Jesus. By means of his power they are enabled to abandon evil actions and to have victory over the power of evil spirits.

What customs do Christians observe?

46. Q: What customs or traditions are observed by those who practice the Christian faith?

Ans: There is a tradition of baptism and the partaking of a special supper.

47. Q: What is the meaning of baptism?

Ans: It is a ceremony that is a sign and a witness that from henceforth I am a follower of Jesus Christ. My sinful obscurations are cleared away and I receive power from the Holy Spirit.

48. Q: What is the significance of the special supper?

Ans: We eat this special supper in order to remember that Jesus suffered on our account (when he was nailed to a cross) and voluntarily offered his life as a sacrificial offering.

49. Q: When should we eat the special supper?

Ans: This is not written in the Scriptures. However, the first disciples observed this ceremony every Sunday.

50. Q: What should we eat for the special supper?

Ans: We eat a little bread and drink a little grape wine, or any fruit juice. The bread symbolises Jesus' body and the wine or juice symbolises his blood.

51. Q: Is there any other tradition?

Ans: Yes, there is. There is a tradition of offering prayer. In order that you will not be defeated by obstructions and sin you should request God's help and blessing. The manner in which Christians ask their Father God is similar to a child who talks with his own beloved father.

52. Q: Is there any other tradition apart from that?

Ans: There is a tradition of offering praise to the Lord. And there is also a tradition of reading the holy Scriptures every day, and also telling others about the way of salvation.

What do Christians believe?

When Christians meet together they often say:

[1] I believe in the one true God. He is the almighty, omniscient, omnipresent and formless Spirit.

[2] I believe that he is the creator of the sky, the earth, man and all the animals.

[3] I also believe that mankind is lost in (to) sin. I was born with a sinful mind that dominates me dominating sinful mind and, because of my sin, I deserve God's punishment. However, it is impossible for me, by my own efforts, to be freed from sin.

[4] I believe that God is love and that he showed incomparable mercy to the world when he sent his only son who was named Jesus.

[5] I believe that God's Son Jesus is God incarnate. The punishment for my sin fell on him and with his precious life, he redeemed me.

[6] I believe his death actually occurred. His dead body was placed in a tomb, but on the third day, he came alive and ascended to heaven.

[7] I believe that when Jesus comes back again he will judge both the living and the dead. Everybody who believes in him will not perish, but will receive eternal life.

[8] I believe that every person who believes in him will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

[9] I believe that when the Lord Jesus comes back, he will take up those people who believe in him, and they will remain with him forever. But those who do not put their faith in him will be judged by him on account of their sins - which remain unforgiven.

Amen.

The Lord Jesus teaches his disciples to pray
(The Lord's Prayer - an adapted version)

Oh! Our precious Father who dwells in the boundless heavenly realm, (1) May your name which is famous everywhere be honoured and praised. (2) May your kingdom be revealed to us. (3) May your will be visibly established (manifested) in all parts of the earth just as it is established in the boundless heavenly realm. (4) Give us today our daily provisions (food). (5) Please forgive and cleanse us from our sin. Just as we have pardoned (and taken no revenge) on those who have harmed us, please forgive us. (6) Do not put us to the test [do not let us fall into the situations which would hinder a virtuous mind and would instead generate a non-virtuous mind but deliver us from evil. (7) The Kingdom and the power and the glory are yours. They are yours forever. Amen!

A short prayer by the composer of "Questions and Answers concerning Religion"

The most high Lord, the Father. Please bless this small book (pecha).
May people all over the land of Tibet read it.
May the readers be released from the shackles of sin.
May the darkness be dispelled and the salvation that comes from you Oh Lord be gladly received by the people of Tibet.
Through the name of Jesus, I offer you thanks.
Please listen graciously to my request. Amen! So be it.

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With an aspiration especially for children may this publication be of benefit to all.

The End of this Catechism.
