Are We Significant in This Vast Universe? – The Evidence Supports Belief in God

Steve Cable considers the question of why we could possibly be important in such a vast universe. Current research shows that there are reasons why God needed such a vast universe to house life on this planet. Understanding this idea can make it an apologetic for our faith rather than a fact which detracts from our faith. Science is the study of God's creation and the more we delve into it the clearer the hand of God becomes.

Why Is the Universe So Vast? Are We Truly Insignificant?

What do you feel when you look at the night sky? Awe? Insignificance? Adoration? Recently, my wife and I took three Ph.D. students from China for an overnight outing at a lake in West Texas. One of the things that impressed them most was the opportunity to view the night sky on a moonless night. Due to "light pollution," people in most cities can only make out a few hundred stars with the naked eye. These young women had never seen the night sky as King David did when he declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God!" (Psalm 19:1, NASU). They were so taken by the stars and the Milky Way that they spent several hours lying on the dock, looking up at the night sky.



These students were not Christians, and I was glad to have an opportunity to use what we know about the stars to talk to them about the overwhelming evidence for a Creator who is intensely interested in humans. However, another host may have used the same night sky to argue that if there is a God, we must not be

very significant to God. Which view is correct? In this article, we will look into the Bible *and* into current scientific theories to better equip us to answer this important question.

According to the Bible, the transcendent Creator of this universe made humans in His own image as the focal point of His creation. Skeptics of a biblical worldview often point to the vastness of the universe as evidence that humans cannot be the focal point of a theistic creation. The famous astronomer, author, and television personality Carl Sagan put it this way:

> Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.{1}

Famous physicist Stephen Hawking wrote, "Our Solar System is certainly a prerequisite for our existence . . . . but there does not seem to be a need for all these other galaxies."{2}

In other words, why would God create this huge universe, if He was primarily interested in His relationship with one species occupying a tiny planet?

I think this is a reasonable question. After all, based on observations from the Hubble Telescope, the current best estimate for the number of stars in the observable universe is

5 times 10 to the 22nd power; that is a 5 with 22 zeros after it. How many stars is that? Well, if you were to count one star every second, it would take you only fifteen hundred trillion years to count them. These stars are spread over billions of light years. Amazingly, all of these stars account for only about 1% of the total mass of the universe. Why did God create such a vast universe, placing us on a single small planet with no reasonable hope of ever traveling beyond our

solar system? Does the size of our universe run counter to a biblical worldview?

A Biblical Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Heavens

If God is the Creator of the universe, and the Bible is revelation directly from God, then accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind. Let's see if this is true in addressing the vastness of the universe.

First let's consider what God's special revelation for us, the Bible, has to say about the vastness of the universe. The Bible often refers to God's creative work in "stretching out the heavens" and filling it with stars (e.g. Job 9:8, Zechariah 12:1). A review of Bible passages on the stars and the heavens reveals a number of reasons why a vast universe is consistent with humans being the most significant part of creation.

We need to realize that creating a vast universe is not harder for God than creating a smaller universe. God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. He had no limits on the amount of matter and energy created. Consequently, it is meaningless to say that it would be a tremendous waste for God to create so many lifeless galaxies. The concept of waste only applies when there is a limited supply. When there is an unlimited supply, you can use all you desire; there is plenty more where that came from.

Within this vast universe, God placed earth in potentially the only place in the universe capable of supporting advanced life. There are many aspects of the universe that are hidden

from the casual observer, but the vastness of the heavens is not one of them. God created the earth and positioned it in an ideal place so that humans could observe the vastness of the heavens and the enormous number of stars. The Bible points out at least five purposes for humans observing this vast universe:

1. *To reveal His majesty and power.* Job refers to this understanding as he reflected on his sufferings stating,

> Who commands the sun not to shine,
> And sets a seal upon the stars;
> Who alone stretches out the heavens
> And tramples down the waves of the sea;
> Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
> And the chambers of the south;
> Who does great things, unfathomable,
> And wondrous works without number.
> Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
> Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him.
> Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
> Who could say to Him, "What are You doing?" (Job 9:7-12).

Later, God confronts Job with His lack of understanding the full power and majesty of His Creator:

> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
> Tell Me, if you have understanding, ...
> Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
> Or loose the cords of Orion?
> Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
> And guide the Bear with her satellites?
> Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
> Or fix their rule over the earth? (Job 38:4, 31-33).

As we see in this passage, God intentionally did creative, wondrous works without number so that we could glimpse His greatness.

2. *To emphasize our insignificance without God.* The vastness of the heavens highlights how insignificant humans are apart from God's concern for us. The primary lesson that Job learned through his experience was that we are in no position to critique God's actions over His creation. God's creation is so vast that any significance we have comes solely from God's choice to be concerned with us. Job stated it this way: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?" (Job 40:4)

King David was the most significant person in Israel during his reign, but when he considered the vastness of God's creation he acknowledged our insignificance:

> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
> The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
> What is man that You take thought of him,
> And the son of man that You care for him (Psalm 8:3-4)?

3. *As a measure of His loving kindness toward us.* God uses the vastness of the heavens to help us understand the magnitude of His love for us, stating, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11).

God's love for us is greater than the billions of light years which separate us from the most distant galaxies.

4. *As a picture of His faithfulness and forgiveness.* In a similar way, God uses our inability to completely grasp the breadth and depth of the universe to emphasize spiritual truths. Through Jeremiah, God promised a new covenant where He will remember our sins no more. God used the vastness of the heavens to convey His promise to never cast those in the new covenant away from Him with these words,

> Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured
> And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
> Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel

> For all that they have done," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:37).

Even today astronomers recognize that the universe we can observe is much smaller than the state of the universe as it exists today. Due to the finite speed of light, it is impossible to directly observe the current size of the universe or count the exact number of stars. Just as the heavens can never be measured, God will never cast us off from His presence.

5. *As a reminder that our understanding is limited.* Our Creator understands the universe from one end to the other and from the beginning of time to its end. As humans, we are just beginning to probe its mysteries. So, God reminds us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

It is clear that God intended us to observe and study the stars and the heavens. As a part of God's general revelation, the magnitude of the universe speaks to His greatness. Through God's special revelation, we see God using the vastness of His creation to teach us lessons about who we are and how we relate to Him. For a Creator who was willing to sacrifice His only Son on the cross for our redemption, it would be child's play to create a vast universe solely for our instruction. With this understanding, the vastness of the universe becomes a testament to our importance to God rather than evidence of our insignificance.

A Scientific Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Universe

If God is the Creator of the universe and the author of the Bible, accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the

general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind.

In his book *Why the Universe is the Way It Is*{3}, Hugh Ross points out a number of areas where combining the latest observations of astronomy and physics with biblical theology provides us with fuller answers for some of the tough questions of life. One area he focuses on is the question we have been examining: "Does the vastness of this universe mean that we are insignificant and/or accidental?"

If we assume, as most skeptics and seekers would, that the physical laws of this universe have remained constant from the beginning of the universe until now, then the current state of scientific knowledge points to three reasons why the universe must occupy the mass and volume that it does in order for advanced carbon based life to exist on this planet.

1. *The exact mass of the universe was necessary for life supporting elements to exist*. Life requires heavier elements such as oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen. These elements are produced in the nuclear furnaces of stars. If there were less mass in the universe, only lighter elements such as helium would be produced. If there were more mass, only heavier elements, such as iron, would be produced. In fact, the amount of mass and dark energy in the universe must be fine tuned to less than one part in 10 to the 60^{th} power, or one part in one trillion trillion trillion trillion trillion, to have a universe that can create a life supporting solar system and planet.

2. *The exact mass of the universe was required to regulate the expansion of the universe to allow the formation of the sun and the solar system.* Amazingly, it turns out that the same total mass that results in the right mix of life supporting elements also results in the right amount of gravity to dampen the expansion of matter across the surface of the space-time

continuum to allow the formation of stars like the sun which are capable of supporting a planet like earth. If the universe were expanding faster, stars and solar systems would not form. If the universe were expanding slower, giant stars and black holes would dominate the universe. Once again the total matter in the universe is fine tuned to support life. And what an amazing coincidence: the number that creates the right mix of elements also creates the right expansion rate. This dual fine tuning is much less likely than achieving the financial returns guaranteed by Bernie Madoff!

3. *The vast volume of the universe is required to give the earth just the right amount of light and other electromagnetic radiation to support life and not destroy it.* Life not only requires a planet with the right mix of elements orbiting the right kind of sun in just the right solar system; it also requires a "just right" galactic environment. Astronomers has discovered what they call "the galactic habitable zone" for our Milky Way galaxy at a distance of about 26,000 light years from the center of the galaxy. Any planet closer to the center will experience deadly radiation levels. Any planet further away from the center would lack the mix of heavy elements necessary for advanced life. But the vast majority of this habitable zone is inside one of the uninhabitable spiral arms of the galaxy. Since stars revolve around the galactic center at a rate different than the spiral arm structure based on their distance from the center of the galaxy, most solar systems pass through deadly spiral arms over the course of time. Our solar system occupies a very special place as Hugh Ross points out: "The solar system holds a special position in the Milky Way . . . the one distance from the core where stars orbit the galaxy at the same rate as its spiral arm structure does."{4}

Once again we are faced with a divine "coincidence": the same fine-tuned distance required to safely place a habitable planet is also the exact distance required to keep that planet

out of the deadly spiral arms.

Not only must the earth be located far from the center of the Milky Way, the Milky Way must be located far enough away from other galaxies to maintain the stability of its spiral structure. Many aspects of the Milky Way appear to be very rare or unique in the universe.

As you can see, a logical application of current scientific orthodoxy based on the Big Bang and constant natural laws overwhelmingly supports the view that the vastness of the universe does not imply that human life is unremarkable and insignificant. On the contrary, the most reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that life on this planet is the primary purpose behind the vastness of our universe. Both the Bible and the results of scientific observation agree: our vast universe is the work of a Creator who considers life on earth as very significant.

Consequently, we don't have to convince a seeker that the world is much younger than it appears in order to answer the question, "Are we significant to our Creator?" We can say, "Whether you look to the teaching of the Bible or you look at the current prevailing models from the scientific community, the answer is definitely yes!" The important question is, "Is it possible to know more about my Creator and have a relationship with Him?" Beginning with the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can explain how to have an eternal relationship with God and why we believe the Bible is the reliable source of information about our Creator and our universe.

• Check out our article "The Answer is the Resurrection" at Probe.org for more information on using the resurrection to respond to key questions from seekers.
• For more information on topics related to the origins of our universe and other science topics, check out our Faith and Science section.

• For further discussion on the age of the universe see "Christian Views of Science and Earth History" in our Faith and Science section.
• For further discussion of how the age of the universe debate relates to this discussion see Appendix A: Theology vs. Science or Theology plus Science? and Appendix B: Apologetics and the Age of the Universe.

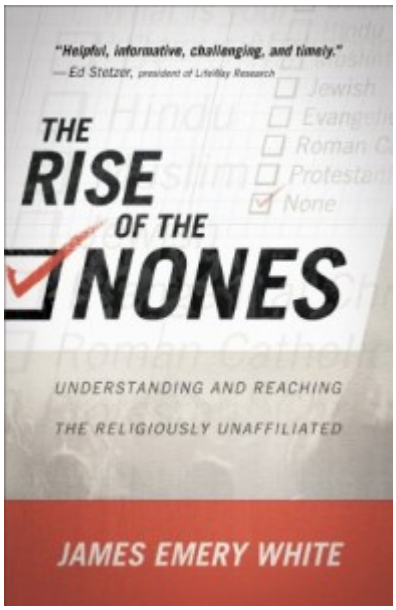
Notes

1. Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York: Random House, 1994).
2. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam, 1988).
3. Hugh Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).
4. Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is*, 66.

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The Rise of the Nones – Reaching the Lost in Today's America

Steve Cable addresses James White's book The Rise of the Nones *in view of Probe's research about the church.*



Probe Ministries is committed to updating you on the status of Christianity in America. In this article, we consider James White's book, *The Rise of the Nones, Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated.*{1} His book addresses a critical topic since the fastest-growing religious group of our time is those who check "none" or "none of the above" on religious survey questions.

Let's begin by reviewing some observations about Christianity in America.



From the 1930's{2} into the early 1990's the percentage of *nones* in America{3} was less than 8%. But by 2012, the number had grown to 20% of all adults and appears to be increasing. Even more alarming, among those between the ages of 18 and 30 the percentage grew by a factor of three, from 11% in 1990 to nearly 32% in 2012.

Another study reported Protestantism is no longer the majority in the U.S., dropping from 66% in the 1960's down to 48% in 2012.

The *nones* tend to consider themselves to be liberal or moderate politically, in favor of abortion and same-sex marriage being legal, and seldom if ever attend religious services. For the most part, they are not atheists and are not necessarily hostile toward religious institutions. However, among those who believe in "nothing in particular," 88% are not even looking for a specific faith or religion.

One report concludes, "The challenge to Christianity . . .

does not come from other religions, but from a rejection of all forms of organized religions. They're not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they are not thinking about it at all."{4} In fact, the 2011 Baylor survey found that 44% of Americans said they spend no time seeking "eternal wisdom," and a Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Americans said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven.

As White notes, these changes in attitude come in the wake of a second major attack on traditional Christian beliefs. The first set of attacks consisted of:

1. Copernicus attacking the existence of God

2. Darwin attacking God's involvement in creation, and

3. Freud attacking our very concept of a creator God.

The second storm of attacks focuses on perceptions of how Christians think in three important areas.

1. An over entanglement with politics linked to anti-gay, sexual conservatism, and abrasiveness

2. Hateful aggression that has the church talking in ways that have stolen God's reputation, and

3. An obsession with greed seen in televangelist transgressions and mega-pastor materialism, causing distrust of the church.

These perceptions, whether true or not, create an environment where there is no benefit in the public mind to self-identifying with a Christian religious denomination.

Living in a Post-Christian America

A 2013 Barna study{5} shows America rapidly moving into a post-Christian status. Their survey-based study came to this

conclusion: over 48% of young adults are post-Christian, and "The influence of post-Christian trends is likely to increase and is a significant factor among today's youngest Americans."{6}

White suggests this trend is the result of "three deep and fast-moving cultural currents: secularization, privatization, and pluralization."{7}

Secularization

Secularization teaches the secular world is reality and our thoughts about the spiritual world are fantasy. White states: "We seem quite content to accept the idea of faith being privately engaging but culturally irrelevant."{8} In a society which is not affirming of public religious faith, it is much more difficult to hold a vibrant, personal faith.

Privatization

Privatization creates a chasm between the public and private spheres of life, trivializing Christian faith to the realm of opinion. Nancy Pearcy saw this, saying, "The most pervasive thought pattern of our times is the two-realm view of truth."{9} In it, the first and public realm is secular truth that states, "Humans are machines." The second and private realm of spirituality states, "Moral and humane ideals have no basis in truth, as defined by scientific naturalism. But we affirm them anyway."{10}

Pluralization

Pluralization tells us all religions are equal in their lack of ultimate truth and their ability to deliver eternity. Rather speaking the truth of Christ, our post-modern ethic tells us we can each have our own truth. As reported in our book, *Cultural Captives*{11}, about 70% of evangelical, emerging adults are pluralists. Pluralism results in making your own suit out of patches of different fabrics and patterns

and expecting everyone else to act as if it were seamless.

White sums up today's situation this way: "They forgot that their God was . . . radically other than man . . . They committed religion functionally to making the world better in human terms and intellectually to modes of knowing God fitted only for understanding this world."{12}

This combination of secularization, privatization and pluralization has led to a mishmash of "bad religion" overtaking much of mainstream Christianity. The underlying basis of the belief systems of *nones* is that there is a lot of truth to go around. In this post-modern world, it is considered futile to search for absolute truth. Instead, we create our own truth from the facts at hand and as necessary despite the facts. Of course, this creates the false (yet seemingly desirable) attribute that neither we, nor anyone else, have to recognize we are sinners anymore. With no wrong, we feel no need for the ultimate source of truth, namely God.

If You Build It, They Won't Come

We've been considering the beliefs and thinking of the *nones*. Can we reach them with the gospel, causing them to genuinely consider the case for Christ?

We are not going to reach them by doing more of the same. Statistics indicate that we are not doing a good job of reaching the *nones*.

As James White notes, "The very people who say they want unchurched people to . . . find Jesus resist the most basic . . . issues related to building a relationship with someone apart from Christ, . . . and inviting them to an open, winsome, and compelling front door so they can come and see."{13}

Paul had to change his approach when addressing Greeks in

Athens. In the same way, we need to understand how to speak to the culture we want to penetrate.

In the 1960's, a non-believer was likely to have a working knowledge of Christianity. They needed to personally respond to the offer of salvation, not just intellectually agree to its validity. This situation made revivals and door-to-door visitation excellent tools to reach lost people.

Today, we face a different dynamic among the *nones*. "The goal is not simply knowing how to articulate the means of coming to Christ; it is learning how to facilitate and enable the person to progress from [little knowledge of Christ], to where he or she is able to even consider accepting Christ."{14}

The rise of the *nones* calls for a new strategy for effectiveness. Today, cause should be the leading edge of our connection with many of the *nones*, in terms of both arresting their attention and enlisting their participation.

Up through the 1980s, many unchurched would respond for salvation and then be incorporated into the church and there become drawn to Christian causes. From 1990 through the 2000s, unchurched people most often needed to experience fellowship in the body before they were ready to respond to the gospel. Today, we have *nones* who are first attracted to the causes addressed by Christians. Becoming involved in those causes, they are attracted to the community of believers and gradually they become ready to respond to the gospel.

We need to be aware of how these can be used to offer the good news in a way that can penetrate through the cultural fog. White puts it this way, "Even if it takes a while to get to talking about Christ, (our church members) get there. And they do it with integrity and . . . credibility. . . Later I've seen those *nones* enfolded into our community and before long . . . the waters of baptism."{15}

Relating to *nones* may be outside your comfort zone, but God

has called us to step out to share His love.

Combining Grace and Truth in a Christian Mind

Every day we are on mission to the unchurched around us. James White suggests ways we can communicate in a way that the *nones* can understand.

We need to take to heart the three primary tasks of any missionary to an unfamiliar culture. First, learn how to communicate with the people we are trying to reach. Second, become sensitized to the new culture to operate effectively within it. Third, "translate the gospel into its own cultural context so that it can be heard, understood, and appropriated."{16}

The growth of the *nones* comes largely from Mainline Protestants and Catholics, right in the squishy middle where there is little emphasis on the truth of God's word. How can we confront them with truth in a loving way?

The gospel of John tells us, "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."{17} Jesus brought the free gift of grace grounded in eternal truth. As we translate the gospel in today's cultural context for the *nones*, this combination needs to shine through our message. What does it look like to balance grace and truth?

• If we are communicating no grace and no truth, we are following the example of Hinduism.

• If we are high on grace – but lacking in truth, we give license to virtually any lifestyle and perspective, affirming today's new definition of tolerance.

• On the other hand, "truth without grace: this is the worst of legalism . . . – what many *nones*

believe to be the hallmark of the Christian faith." The real representative of dogma without grace is Islam." In a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity, they said that as Muslims, they could never be certain of their forgiveness and salvation as Christians can.

• Grace is the distinctive message of Christianity but never remove it from the truth of the high cost Christ paid. Jesus challenged the religious thought of the day with the truth of God's standard. Recognizing we cannot achieve that standard, we are run to the grace of God by faith.

To communicate the truth, we need to respond to the new questions *nones* are asking of any faith. As White points out, "I do not encounter very many people who ask questions that classical apologetics trained us to answer . . . Instead, the new questions have to do with significance and meaning." Questions such as, "So, what?" and "Is this God of yours really that good?"

We need to be prepared to "give a defense for the hope that is within us" in ways that the *nones* around us can resonate with, such as described in our article *The Apologetics of Peter* on our website.

Opening the Front Door to *Nones*

The *nones* desperately need the truth of Jesus, yet it is a challenge to effectively reach them. "Reaching out to a group of people who have given up on the church, . . . we must renew our own commitment to the very thing they have rejected – the church."{18} The fact that some in today's culture have problems with today's church does not mean that God intends to abandon it.

The church needs to grasp its mandate "to engage in the process of 'counter-secularization'. . . There are often disparaging quips made about organized religion, but there was

nothing disorganized about the biblical model."{19} We all have a role to play in making our church a force for the gospel in our community.

It must be clear to those outside that we approach our task with civility and unity. Our individual actions are not sufficient to bring down the domain of darkness. Jesus told us that if those who encounter the church can sense the unity holding us together they will be drawn to its message.

How will the *nones* come into contact with the unity of Christ? It will most likely be through interaction with a church acting as the church. As White points out, "If the church has a "front door," and it clearly does, why shouldn't it be . . . strategically developed for optimal impact for . . . all *nones* who may venture inside?"{20} Surveys indicate that 82 percent of unchurched people would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.

One way we have a chance to interact with *nones* is when they expose their children to a church experience. Children's ministry is not something to occupy our children while we have church, but is instead a key part of our outreach to the lost *nones* in our community. "What you do with their children could be a deal breaker."

In today's culture, we cannot overemphasize the deep need for visual communication. Almost everyone is attuned to visually receiving information and meaning. By incorporating visual arts in our church mainstream, "it has a way of sneaking past the defenses of the heart. And nones need a lot snuck past them."{21}

We need to keep evangelism at the forefront. "This is no time to wave the flag of social ministry and justice issues so single-mindedly in the name of cultural acceptance and the hip factor that it becomes our collective substitute for the clear articulation of the gospel."{22}

White clearly states our goal, “Our only hope and the heart of the Great Commission, is to stem the tide by turning the nones into wons.”{23}

Notes

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13. White, p. 83.
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16 White, p. 114.
17. John 1:15.
18. White, p. 155.
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21. White, p. 163.

22 White, p. 180.
23. White, p. 181.

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Biblical Worldview: Parents and Pastors Are Not Passing It On

Steve Cable reviews the dismal results of surveying the worldview of American Christians.

Problem: How Parents are Missing the Mark

Following up on our series of articles featuring the results from Probe's recent 2020 survey of American Religious Beliefs{1}, we want to add to that understanding drawing on data collected and analyzed by George Barna of the Christian Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Since 2020, the Christian Research Center has taken multiple surveys to assess the worldviews and the values of American adults. In 2023, Barna released a book entitled *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States*.{2}



Looking at the spiritual status and worldviews of America's parents of children living at home, our data and Barna's book both show the vast majority of Americans do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on to their children. Equally disturbing at a parenting level, most of them "do not even have the worldview

development of their children on their radar."{3} To make this situation worse for the future of American Christianity, most Evangelical parents fall into the same category as other parents– a fractured, inconsistent worldview with no intentional plan to impart their worldview or any other worldview to their children.

Some people might want to argue that worldviews are personal, and children need to develop a personal worldview without parental intervention. That way they can own and nurture this view as young adults, finding something that works for them. Such an argument might have some substance, if we were talking about forming your views on how one might select sports teams to root for or even choose a career to pursue. But when we talk about worldviews, we are talking about the fundamentals of life including things such as "Where did life originate?", "What does it mean to be a person?", "Why is there evil and suffering in the world?", "How can we escape the destructive forces of sin in our life?", "Can we be restored to a relationship with our creator?" and others.

There are radically different answers to these questions being promoted in our society today. If you are an Evangelical Christian, you know that true biblical answers to these questions are under constant attack.
You should expect your children to choose to flee from these attacks by adopting another, nonbiblical worldview unless they have been given good reasons to believe the biblical answers are true.

If you believe that a biblical worldview is the only foundation upon which to build a life that will echo through eternity, you need to be actively teaching, testing and encouraging your children with the truth. To do this you will need to repair your worldview along biblical guidelines and develop a plan for building these worldview truths into your children.

But first, we will look at the lies that have crept into many worldviews including those held by Christian parents.

The Victory of Syncretism

George Barna's research as well as our own clearly show a breakdown of biblically based thinking not only among the general population but also among those who identify as Evangelicals. Barna's recent research found that two-thirds of parents of preteens claim to be Christian, but only 4% of them possess a biblical worldview. So, what kind of worldview do they hold?

Barna surveyed adults in America using worldview questions to divide our population into seven different worldviews ranging from Biblical Theism to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to Postmodernism to Eastern Mysticism. Surprisingly, the most popular worldview was Biblical Theism but held by only 2% of the parents of preteens. All the other worldviews offered were at 1% or less.

Wait, you may be asking! That sum adds up to less than 8% of the population and you would be right. What happened is that 94% of these parents were classified as being Syncretists. "Syncretism is a blending of multiple worldviews in which no single life philosophy is dominant, producing a worldview that is diverse and **often self-contradictory**."{4} Since the rise of postmodernism (and probably before), more and more American have no problem holding a set of views which are at best inconsistent. Barna found most of these syncretistic parents gathered their worldview ideas from different parts of three of the candidate worldviews: Eastern Mysticism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, and Biblical Theism. When considered as a whole, each of these worldviews is distinctly different and in fact counter to the other two.

We see that Americans tend to embrace beliefs in the different areas of worldview that seem attractive in that area, are

espoused by many of their friends, and that they see espoused on their media outlets of choice. As one scholar describes it, “Central to syncretism is the belief that all religions offer truth, or that different religions present different paths to God. Syncretism operates on the assumption that combining certain teachings produces a better way of knowing and/or reaching God.”

Barna found that less than one third of adults turn to the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance. Of course, even fewer turn to the sacred texts of other religions. American adults, without placing their faith in historical worldviews, feel a freedom to create their own way to view the world. In fact, 58% of adults believe that moral truth is up the individual to decide. Since all truth is relative, inconsistencies and contradictions are not worth considering. Certainly a careful examination of the so-called truth that all truth is relative would show the falsehood in that statement.

The dominant worldview thinking of Americans assumes that the details of the faith you ascribe to don’t matter as long as you place your faith in something AND you don’t presume to question anyone else’s object of faith. As you can see, this way of thinking creates a tough wall for any evangelistic message to overcome. People are not programmed to think, “Isn’t it nice that this Christian is concerned for my eternal situation and wants to tell me the way I can improve it.” Instead, they think, “How can this person be so rude and confrontational as to present their views as the only viable truth? This person needs to be shunned.”

At the end of this essay, we will consider some strategies for tearing down this wall.

Values and Beliefs of Young Parents

As noted above, two major barriers exist, preventing the

development of biblical leaning worldviews for our pre-teens. First, most parents do not take any concrete actions to pass on or promote a particular worldview. Instead, they leave it to the culture around their children to instill a worldview framework. If these parents have a somewhat Christian perspective themselves, they ignore the teaching of Deuteronomy where God tells us, "*These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up*."{5} And in the New Testament epistle Ephesians, Paul writes, "*Bring your children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*."{6}

Secondly, the vast majority of parents, including many Evangelical parents, do not possess a biblical worldview to pass on. In some areas, they depart from the clear biblical teaching and subscribe to the lies of the world. As Barna points out, "*The parents of children under the age of 13 are a stellar example of this Christian nominalism that is widely accepted as spiritually normal and healthy*." {7} Let's examine some the areas where parents are failing to uphold a biblical worldview.

As Christians, we know that God created human life as sacred. Even as fallen humans, God considered our lives so important that Jesus came to die, taking on the price of our sin. And yet according to Barna's recent book, over three fourths of American parents do not suppose that human life is sacred. This gap in a biblical worldview leads to a nation where many worship a woman's ability to choose an abortion over the sacred obligation to protect life. In fact, over 85% of parents do not consider human life as sacred and/or support having an abortion if raising the child would be **too inconvenient** for the parents. To put it bluntly, the right to live a life without inconveniences is more important than another person's right to live at all.

Another example is that less that one in four self-identified Christian parents oppose the notion that having faith matters more than which faith. They are essentially saying if you have faith in Buddha, Mohammed, or your household idol, that is just as good as having faith in Christ. These parents (and remember, these are people who identify themselves as Christians) believe that God would sacrifice His Son, turning His back on Jesus as He took the sins of the world upon Himself, when there were already other ways people could be restored to God that would require no love or sacrifice on the part of God. This inconsistent, self-contradictory thinking is a hallmark
of the syncretistic views that dominate our society.

Barna also found that only one in ten parents have a consistently biblical perspective on God, creation, and history. Without this understanding, their children cannot be expected to grasp these key precepts on their own.

With this combination of *laissez-faire* parenting and a lack of a consistent biblical worldview, the natural conclusion is that the upcoming generation of young adults will be even further removed from clear biblical thinking than the current generation. Unfortunately, this result is almost certain without a concerted effort by concerned Christians to communicate the truth.

Pastors (for the most part) Not Helping Combat the Decline

As we consider the decline in American young adults who profess and live according to a biblical worldview, we might ask what influences are in play to counter this decline. One of the questions Barna addresses is “How well are America’s pastors working to stem this discouraging tide on unbelief?” To get a handle on this question, he surveyed 1,000 pastors across America including Senior Pastors, Youth Pastors and

Teaching Pastors.{8}

If these pastors are going to help turn people back to a biblical worldview, they need to possess one themselves. What the survey found was only four out of ten Senior Pastors professed a biblical worldview. This result is disheartening, but perhaps even more startling only 12% of the Youth Pastors claimed a biblical worldview. One third of the pastors surveyed did not even read their Bible at least once a week. So, the vast majority of our children who are attending church regularly have no chance of receiving a clearly articulated biblical worldview from the spiritual leaders their parents are relying on for sound spiritual teaching.

Well, you may be thinking, *these results are for all pastors, but I attend an evangelical church so I can be confident in the teaching my children will receive.* It is true that while only one out of three Mainline Protestant pastors profess a biblical worldview, we can expect Evangelical pastors to be significantly better. But even Evangelical pastors still only have about one out of two (50%) with a biblical worldview. This result implies that half of the Evangelical churches in America are not teaching a biblical worldview.

Southern Baptists and non-denominational Evangelicals do score significantly higher. Among Southern Baptists, over three out of four pastors professed a consistent biblical worldview. This significantly higher number may result from Southern Baptist churches requiring candidates for pastoral positions to affirm their belief in the Baptist Faith and Message document. Similarly, almost two out of three non-denominational pastors supported such a worldview.

In Barna's analysis, an Integrated Disciple was defined as someone who "*professed a biblical worldview and successfully integrated their biblical beliefs into their daily behavior.*"{9} One would think the pastors of mid-sized and large churches would be the most educated and very likely to

be Integrated Disciples. However, what the survey revealed was that only 15% of pastors at churches with over 250 in average attendance were identified as Integrated Disciples. It is hard to find a disciple who is not following a spiritual leader, but in these churches such a leader will be hard to find.

Some people would like to believe that it doesn't matter which church you go to as long as you are going to church. Probe's and Barna's results show this hopeful view to be unfounded. Among Roman Catholics, less that 6% of the priests profess a biblical worldview. This lack of biblical leadership is clearly evident among those people who regularly attend Catholic mass where less that one out of one hundred profess a clear biblical worldview.

Today it is of utmost importance that Christian parents examine the teaching coming from the pastors and other leaders at their church. If the teaching does not reflect a biblical worldview, you should run, not walk, to the nearest exit and search for another church.

How to Combat the Decline in Biblical Worldview Believers

In this article, we have been highlighting the decline in the portion of our population who profess a biblical review, drawing on the research results presented in the book, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23*. Although it helps to know the facts about the beliefs of most Americans, just reviewing and lamenting the data does not really accomplish anything. We want to consider and act on the steps we can take as individuals and churches to plant and tend to a new generation of Integrated Disciples in our country.

Barna calls on us to intentionally teach the key doctrines of an evangelical, biblical worldview in our seminaries, our churches, and our homes. As recent history has clearly demonstrated, just assuming that younger generations will

catch our biblical worldview is doomed to failure. We need to systematically, intentionally, and repeatedly extol and explain the key truths that make us those who "*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.*"{10} Barna suggests the following key truths to focus on:

1. An orthodox, biblical understanding of God which understands that God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect, and just creator of the universe who rule that universe today. Among parents of children under 13, just 40% hold that view.

2. All human beings are sinful by nature; every choice we make has moral contours and consequences. A vast majority of Americans, about three out of four, do not believe that humans are born with a sin nature and are certain to sin "and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ."

3. Jesus Christ's sacrificial death is the only way to be reconciled with our holy God. We receive this free gift through our repentance and our confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Only three out of ten adults believe this is the only way to heaven, while only 2 of 100 believe they will go to hell after they die.

4. The entire Bible is true, reliable and relevant. When we understand how we received the Bible and how it applies to every aspect of our life and earth and in heaven, it changes how we perceive and interact with the world.

5. Absolute moral truth exists—and those truths are defined by God. Absolute truth can only be known by the source of truth, our Creator. Unfortunately, the majority of adults believe that determining moral truth is up to each individual.

6. The ultimate purpose of human life is to know, love, and

serve God. If we know the true God, we will "*love Him because He first loved us*"{11} and we will want to serve Him through "*the good works He has prepared for us.*"{12} Most young Americans say they lack meaning and purpose. They will never be able to find truly meaningful purpose apart from Christ.

7. Success on earth is best understood as consistent obedience to God. If we understand that we are eternal beings who in Christ are the recipients of an eternal inheritance, we can see that our true success cannot be found in the temporal pleasures of this world. Only 20% of adults embrace this definition of success.

In my experience, I have watch numerous young people grow up in a church and then leave to either thrive in a dynamic Christ-honoring life or fall away into a syncretic worldview, serving their own interests. The world system is constantly feeding them with lies and attacking the truths they have been taught. So, how can we do a better job of helping build strong Christians with a solid biblical worldview?

First, we must teach them the seven truths listed above. Not once, but many times and in many situations. Their parents must talk about these truths and their churches must teach these truths.

Second, we must ask them regularly to explain what they believe. Just because they have sat under teaching does not mean they have learned any lessons. To believe we should test high school students to determine what they have learned and then ignore testing students of the Bible is at best foolhardy.

Third, we must tell these students as they enter into more of the secular world that we are still there for them. Tell them, "If someone or something causes you to question what you have learned, don't just throw out what you have learned and follow

something else. Come tell me about it and why it seems like it may be true. I have been in similar halls to the ones you are walking through now. I am convinced that the only source of real truth is found in Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Let's look at it together." Let us "*bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ*."{13}

Notes

1. Steve Cable, *Understanding a Post-Christian America in 2020*, probe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Post-Christian-America.pdf
2. George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2022-23: The Annual Report of the State of Worldview in the United States*, Arizona Christian University Press, 2023.
3. Ibid., page 7.
4. Ibid., page 12.
5. Deuteronomy 6:6-7
6. Ephesians 6:4
7. Barna, page 27.
8. Ibid., page 41.
9. Ibid., page 51.
10. 1 Peter 2:9
11. 1 John 4:19
12. Ephesians 2:10
13. Galatians 6:2

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The Answer Is the Resurrection

Steve Cable shows us that the resurrection is the key apologetic for those seeking to evangelize. As we share our

faith, understanding the evidence for the resurrection helps prepare us to answer questions raised by a seeker after the truth.

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”{1}



I want to encourage you to make this verse a motivator for your own walk as an ambassador for Christ. You might say, “I am not equipped to make a defense. Surely, this verse is talking to pastors and people like the researchers at Probe.” A deeper look at Peter’s letter shows us that this is not the case. Peter makes it clear that these instructions are for all Christians.{2} In addition, Peter wrote this verse in the imperative tense, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion.

Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”{3}

So, our hope is a living hope for an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. If I am to make a defense for this hope of eternal life, I need to be able to explain why I believe that the source of this hope has both the capability and the motivation to follow through on this offer.

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"! Jesus' resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.{4} So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at evidence for the resurrection and how a defense of the resurrection is the foundation for answering many of the objections raised against Christianity.

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus' resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a list of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."{5}

One help to remembering the overwhelming evidence is to think of the ten A's attesting to Jesus' resurrection:

1. *Accurate predictions*. Both the Old and New Testaments contain predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples and the Jewish authorities that He would rise to life after three days in the earth. In John 2, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus told this to the Jewish leaders. It made such an impression on

the disciples, that verse 22 tells us, “So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.”

2. *Attesting miracles*. Jesus’ resurrection was not a sudden miraculous cap to an otherwise unremarkable life. Jesus had consistently demonstrated His authority over the material universe from turning water into wine, to walking on the water, to healing the sick, to raising Lazarus from the dead. His resurrection is consistent with the power He demonstrated during His earthly ministry.

3. *Agonizing death*. Jesus had numerous opportunities to avoid a fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. No one is going to go through a Roman scourging and crucifixion as a hoax. Jesus submitted to the cross because it was necessary to pay for our sins and He knew that He had the authority to conquer death.

4. *Angry authorities*. After word of Jesus’ resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

5. *Absent body*. The chief priests set a guard around Jesus’ tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards “reported to the chief priests all that had happened.”{6} Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

6. *Amazed disciples*. After Jesus’ arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they

despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.{7} Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

7. *Agreeing eyewitnesses*. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. They testified to His resurrection. We do not have a record of anyone disputing their testimony, saying "I was there with them and it was a hoax."

8. *Apostolic martyrs*. People don't die for something they know to be a hoax. Yet, many of these eyewitnesses accepted death rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.

9. *Agnostic historians*. Contemporary, non-Christian historians reported that Jesus was reputed to have risen from the dead and that his followers were willing to die rather than recant their belief in Jesus.

10. *Attesting Spirit*. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to objections by asking, "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?" If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the

Resurrection

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the key to making a defense for our living hope. Let's consider some common objections to Christianity, and see how the resurrection can be the starting point for a reasoned response.

1. Is there a God still active in this universe?

Jesus' resurrection shows there is a power that transcends the physical universe. A transcendent God is the only power that can override decay and death. As the apostle Peter wrote, "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."{8}

Jesus' resurrection declares God's active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time.{9}

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world.{10} Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."{11}

But if the dead are raised, then we need to live with eternity in mind. It becomes a top priority to know the one who controls eternity, God.

3. Is the Bible really God's revelation? Every religion has their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of

John states, “So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.”{12}

If Jesus’ resurrection caused His disciples to believe the Bible, it is certainly sufficient to cause me to believe.

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

Jesus’ resurrection shows the depth of God’s love for you. Without the crucifixion there would be no resurrection. His crucifixion cries out “God loves you!” Romans tells us that “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”{13}

Being singled out for God’s love makes you very significant in His universe.

5. How can anyone know the truth about life and death?

Jesus’ resurrection gives Him firsthand knowledge. He has been beyond death and returned. His knowledge transcends this physical universe. Jesus gives us an eyewitness for eternal life. He told Pilate, “My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.”{14}

Jesus testifies to the truth regarding eternal life. We can trust His testimony because of the resurrection.

6. Why should I believe that Jesus is God’s divine Son?

Jesus’ resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim victory over decay and death.

He said that “I and the Father are one.” His victory over death confirms His claim, crying out through the ages “He is God!” As Paul proclaims in Romans, “[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.”{15}

7. Aren't there many ways to God? Can Jesus be the only way?

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is a the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.{16}

8. How can I possibly be forgiven for my sins?

Jesus' resurrection validates His claim to have victory over sin and death. The ultimate result of sin is death, and Jesus conquered death.{17} In Romans chapter 10 we learn "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."{18}

Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a central part of saving faith.

9. Why should I believe God is involved in His creation? I don't see God making much difference in this world.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."{19}

10. How can a loving God allow all of the evil in this world?

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us.{20} Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without

a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

Once someone accepts the resurrection, many other barriers to accepting Christ are torn down. Whatever the question, the answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

May what John said of the disciples be true of us as well: "So when He was raised from the dead, . . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."{21}

Notes

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3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
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6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32
8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.

19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
20. John 3:16.
21. John 2:22.

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Gen-Z: The Generation That Ends Christian Influence in

America?

In order to grow the number of Gen-Z Christians, we need an understanding of ways to build bridges from their pluralistic, secular worldview to seriously contemplating the unique grace of God. Steve Cable draws upon the wisdom of two pastors who are making a real difference in the lives of young adults to address this important topic.

What Are Gen-Zs Like?



In this article we look beyond the Millennials to consider the latest generation and what they tell us about the future of Evangelicals in America. Gen-Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010. This year, half of the Gen-Z generation are 18 or older. By the time they are all at least 18, the Millennials and Gen-Zs will make up almost 50% of the adult population. We will consider how this generation compares with previous generations. We want to understand this generation to truly communicate the good news of the gospel to them; to help them "to walk in a manner worth of the Lord."{1}

In their book, *So the Next Generation Will Know*{2}, Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace identified some key traits common among Gen-Zs. They are:

1. Digital Multitaskers – "spending nearly every waking hour interacting with . . . digital technology," often while watching television
2. Impatient – quickly moving from thing to thing with an attention span of around 8 seconds
3. Fluid – constantly blurring the lines; making truth, genders, and family structures personal choices
4. Lonely – swamped in social media where personal relationships are minimized while personal troubles

follow them everywhere. Sean points to “the availability of endless counterfeits that claim to be able to fill their hearts with meaning.”{3}

5. Individualistic – individual feelings more important than facts while judging the choices of others is avoided. As James White points out in Meet Generation Z{4}, “the ability to find whatever they’re after without the help of intermediaries . . . has made them more independent. . . . Like no other generation before, Gen-Z faces a widening chasm between wisdom and information.”{5}

Most importantly, most of these young Americans are thoroughly secular with little exposure to Christian theology. As White opines, “They are lost. They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post-Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. . . . They have endless amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors.”{6}

As they enter adulthood, the culture around them will not encourage them to consider the claims of Christ. In fact, the Millennials going before them are already seen leaving any Christian background behind as they age into their thirties.

Gen-Z: How Are They Trending?

What can we truly know about the religious thinking of Gen-Zs age 11 to 25? Pew Research surveyed teens and their parents giving us a glimpse into both{7}.

They found *one third* of American teens are religiously Unaffiliated.{8} In contrast, their parents were less than *one quarter* Unaffiliated. Another Pew survey{9} found more than *half* of young adult Gen-Zs are unaffiliated. This group is easily the largest religious group among Gen-Zs.

Teens attend church services with their parents, but lag

behind in other areas. Less than *one fourth* of teens consider religion very important. And on an absolute belief in God and praying daily, the teens trail their parents significantly.

Using an index of religious commitment{10}, almost *half* of the parents but only *one third* of teens rated high. In fact, almost half of teenagers with parents who rated high did not rate high themselves.{11}

Perhaps the minds of teenagers are mush. Their views will firm up as they age. In reality, older Gen-Zs and Millennials also trail older adults by more than 20 points in believing in God and praying daily.{12} Also, church attendance drops dramatically among these young adults who are no longer attending with parents.

If religion were important to teens, they would look to religious teaching and beliefs to help make decisions about what is right and wrong. But less than *one third* of teens affiliated with a religion turned to its teachings to make such decisions.

As George Barna reports,{13} "The faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades." It seems that Gen-Z will increase this gap.

Gen-Z: Worldview and Apologetics

Why have the Unaffiliated been growing dramatically over the last 25 years while doctrinally consistent Christians have been declining? At one level, we recognize the watered-down gospel taught in many churches encourages people to pursue other things and not waste time on church. That may have been the primary issue at one time. But in this decade, we are seeing a real reduction in the number of Evangelicals as well. The self-professed Evangelicals{14} among those ages 18 to 29

has reduced from 29% down to 20%, a reduction of almost one third.

One major driver is the dominant worldview of our young adult society. The worldview promoted by our schools, media, and entertainment industry has changed from a Christian inspired worldview to a worldview which is secular and specifically anti-Christian. As James White observes, "It's simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian."{15}

Almost all Gen-Zs have been brought up hearing the worldview of Scientism espoused. This worldview teaches "that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified . . . If something cannot be examined in a tangible, scientific manner, it is not simply unknowable, it is meaningless."{16} At the same time, most Gen-Zs have not even been exposed to an Evangelical Christian worldview. Consequently, apologetics is critical for opening their minds to hear the truth of the gospel. Many of them need to understand that the basic tenets of a Christian worldview can be true before they will consider whether these tenets are true for them. Answering questions such as: "Could there be a creator of this universe?" and "Could that creator possibly be involved in this world which has so much pain and suffering?" is a starting point to opening their minds to a Christian view.

Encouraging Gen-Zs to understand the tenets of their worldview and comparing them to a Christian worldview begins the process of introducing them to the gospel. As White points out, "I have found that discussing the awe and wonder of the universe, openly raising the many questions surrounding the universe and then positing the existence of God, is one of the most valuable approaches that can be pursued."{17} The Christian worldview is coherent, comprehensive and compelling as it

explains why our world is the way it is and how its trajectory may be corrected into one that honors our Creator and lifts up people to a new level of life.

Gen-Z: Removing the Isolation of Faith

What will it take to reach Gen-Z? James White says, ". . . the primary reason Gen-Z disconnects from the church is our failure to equip them with a biblical worldview that empowers them to understand and navigate today's culture."{18} If we want to equip Gen-Zs to embrace faith, we must directly discuss worldview issues with them.

The challenge is exacerbated as most Gen-Zs are taught a redefined tolerance: to not only accept classmates with different worldviews, e.g. Muslims and the Unaffiliated, but to believe that it is as true for them as your parents' worldview is for them. As Sean McDowell states, "Gen-Zs are exposed to more competing worldviews—and at an earlier age—than any generation in history."{19}

The new tolerance leads directly to a pluralistic view of salvation. Christ stated, "No one comes to the Father except through me,"{20} and Peter preached that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved."{21} Yet the survey of American teens{22} finds *less than one third* believe that only one religion is true, broken up into *two-thirds* of Evangelicals and *less than one-third* of Mainlines and Catholics.

Compounding these issues is the growing practice of limiting the impact of religious beliefs on real life. Sean points out, "The biggest challenge in teaching worldview to young people is the way our increasingly secular culture fosters the compartmentalization of faith."{23} We need to help them see how a consistent Christian worldview applies to all issues. It is foolish to segregate your spiritual beliefs from your life decisions.

As an example, many Gen-Zs are enamored by a socialist view that the government should provide everything we need, equally distributing goods and services to all. Those who work hard and excel will have their productivity redistributed equally. It sounds like a possibly good approach and yet it has destroyed the economies of many countries including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. It fails because it is based on a worldview that "assumes greed comes from inequality in the distribution of material goods in society."{24} In contrast, the Bible is clear that greed is part of the fallenness of the human heart. As a result, any centralized function with no competition discourages productivity and becomes an inefficient bureaucracy.

Reaching Gen-Zs

Today, most Gen-Zs move into adulthood with little exposure to the gospel. The majority are either Unaffiliated, another religion, or have a nominal Christian background. Current surveys find that 98% of young Americans do not have a Christian worldview.{25}

This sobering data does not mean giving up on reaching Gen-Z. But if we are not intentional about it, we are not going to stem the tide. As James White observes, "What is killing the church today is (focusing) on keeping Christians within the church happy, well fed, and growing. The mission . . . must be about those who have not crossed the line of faith."

And Sean McDowell points out that we need "to teach the difference between subjective and objective truth claims and make sure they understand that Christianity falls in the latter category."{26}

Sean encourages a focus on relationships saying, "Relationships are the runway on which truth lands. Take the time to listen with empathy, monitor from a place of wisdom, and demonstrate your concern."{27} White agrees, saying, "If

we want (them) to know the faith, we have to teach, model and incarnate truth in our relationship with them."{28} From a place of relationship, we can address challenges keeping them from truly hearing the gospel.

One key challenge is the role of media. As Sean notes, "Media shapes their beliefs, and it also shapes the orientation of their hearts."{29} To counter this pervasive influence, he suggests engaging them in a skeptic's blog. Help them consider 1) what claim is being made, 2) is the claim relevant if true, and 3) decide how to investigate the claim.{30} By learning to investigate claims, they are examining the truth of the gospel. We should never fear the gospel coming up short when looking for the truth.

Key ways White's church is connecting with the Unaffiliated include:

1. Rethinking evangelism around Paul's message in Athens. Tantalizing those with no background to search for truth in Christ.
2. Teaching the grace/truth dynamic in quick segments consistent with their learning styles.
3. Being cultural missionaries – learning from those who have not been Christians.
4. Cultivating a culture of invitation by creating tools to invite friends all the time.

If we focus on growing the number of Gen-Z Christians, we could change the trajectory of American faith. If we devote ourselves to prayer, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and reaching the lost in America rather than continuing church as usual, God can use us to turn the tide.

Notes

1. Colossians 1:9.
2. Josh McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 2019, David C. Cook.

3. McDowell and Wallace, p. 66.
4. James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Baker Books, 2017.
5. White, p. 44.
6. White, p. 64-65.
7. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals, September 10, 2020.
8. These are people who self-identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. In previous surveys, we referred to them as the Nones. Calling them the "unaffiliated" helps us avoid the confusion between "Nones" and "nuns."
9. Call out Pew survey from 2019.
10. The index of religious commitment looks at the answers to questions on church attendance, belief in God, prayer, and importance of religion and rates a respondents commitment from high to low based on their answers.
General Social Survey, 2018.
11. 42% of the teenagers with parents with a high index had a medium or low index.
12. General Social Survey, 2018
13. American Worldview Inventory 2020, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.
14. Pew Research surveys 2007, 2014, 2019.
15. White, p. 130.
16. White, p. 141.
17. White, p. 139.
18. White, p. 80.
19. McDowell and Wallace, p. 81.
20. John 14:6b.
21. Acts 4:12.
22. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens.
23. McDowell and Wallace, p. 87.
24. Ibid, p. 93.
25. American Worldview Inventory 2020.
26. McDowell and Wallace, p. 113.
27. McDowell and Wallace, p. 78.

28. White, p. 64.
29. McDowell and Wallace, p. 164.
30. Ibid, p. 173-4.

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Religious Trends Over the Last Decade

Probe VP Steve Cable examines some of the findings of the Probe Survey 2020: The Changing Face of Christianity in America.

Religious Trends Over the Last Fifty Years

In late 2020, Probe administered a new survey{1} to over 3,000 Americans ages 18 through 55 as a follow up to our 2010 survey{2}. Comparing these two surveys reveals a striking decline in Christian religious beliefs and practice across America over the last decade. Before focusing on these changes, let's begin with a foundational question.

How have young adult religious affiliations changed over the last five decades?



As documented in the General Social Surveys{3} from 1970 through 1990, their religious affiliations remained fairly constant. Since then, there have been significant changes.

The most dramatic change is found in young adults under thirty

who select a non-Christian affiliation. This group grew from about one fifth of the population in 1990 to almost half today. Those non-Christians from other religious faiths{4} such as Judaism, Islam, and Mormonism, grew slightly up to about 10% of the U.S. young adult population. At the same time, **the Unaffiliated (i.e. Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing in Particular) almost tripled** to over a third of the population. Among the Unaffiliated, the Nothing in Particular category had by far the largest growth. The Pew Research surveys show an even greater increase, growing from 27% in 1996 to 59% in 2020.

Now bringing in the data from GSS 2010 survey, we learn that 26% of those in their twenties were Unaffiliated in 2010, growing to 30% of those in their thirties in 2018. This result means that more people in their twenties became Unaffiliated in their thirties. This result runs directly counter to the supposition of many that the growth in Unaffiliated would dissipate as young adults age and return to churches to raise their families.

Conversely, **Christian groups declined** with Other Protestants{5} dropping by half, from about one in four down to less than one in eight young adult Americans. Catholics also experienced major losses, dropping by one quarter down to less than one in five young adult Americans over this thirty-year period.

Although less affected, the Evangelical affiliation also experienced a drop in recent years. GSS reported a small decline in young adult, born again Protestants, from about one in four down to around one in five Americans. Pew Research{6} reported a steeper decline in young adult Evangelicals, from 28% in 2007 down to 20% in 2019.

Perhaps this decline is a winnowing out of those whose Christian beliefs are not vital to their lives. In which case, a greater percentage of born again Christians should hold a

strong biblical worldview now in 2020 than in 2010. In the next section, we will explore this topic to find out the truth of the matter.

Born Again Young Adults and a Biblical Worldview

In the next sections, we will be focusing on Born Again Christians in our Probe results. A Born Again Christian is someone who says:

1. I have made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in my life today and
2. I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

We can compare the responses of Born Again Christians to those of Other Protestants and Catholics.

What portion of these three groups have a Basic Biblical Worldview strongly affirming that:

1. God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator who rules the world today.{7}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.
3. A person cannot be good enough to earn a place in heaven.
4. While on earth, Jesus committed no sins like other people do.

All four concepts above are key components of God's redemptive plan. For example, Jesus being sinless made it possible for his death to redeem us.{8} Or, if the Bible is inaccurate in some of its teachings how could we know that it is correct in teaching about redemption?

In 2020 for those ages 18 through 39, one of four Born Again Christians, one of twenty Other Protestants and one of one hundred Catholics affirmed all four of these foundational

beliefs. The statement least likely to be affirmed by all three groups was “a person cannot earn a place in heaven”. Perhaps many have been influenced by the current postmodern thinking that what’s not true for you can be true for someone else.

Only Born Again Christians had a sizable minority of one fourth affirming this worldview. In contrast, nearly half of Born Again Christians affirmed it in 2010. Clearly, this last decade had a serious impact on the perception of what it means to be a Christian.

We see a similar drop when comparing those ages 18 to 29 in 2010 with the same cohort now 30 to 39 in 2020, once again belying the notion that young adults will return to a conservative faith in their thirties. Instead of a noticeable increase as the cohort aged, we see a sizeable drop in those who affirm these key Christian doctrinal statements.

As the percent of true Christians drops, the ability to reach out with the gospel is surely reduced. However, Christians in the Roman Empire in AD 60 were an even smaller portion. Three hundred years later virtually the entire empire was nominally Christian. If we “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light{9},” God will bring many to repentance.

Born Again Young Adults and Pluralism

Pluralism is the belief that there are multiple ways to be right with God. **Pluralism and Christianity are not compatible**. Jesus clearly stated, “*No one comes to the Father except through me*.”{10} The
high price paid through Jesus’ life and death excludes the possibility of Jesus being one of several options. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “*There is salvation in no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved*.”{11}

What does Probe's new survey reveal about pluralism? Confronted with the statement, "Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God," how did American Christians respond? Do they align with clear biblical teaching by strongly disagreeing? For those ages 18 through 39, we found that about one third of Born Again Christians, one in eight Other Protestants, and one in twenty Catholics did so. An overwhelming majority of Christians chose to accept a belief that devalues the death and resurrection of our Lord. Once again, only Born Again Christians had a sizeable minority of one third who agreed with Jesus and the New Testament.

Looking back to 2010, was there a significant change among Born Again Christians during this decade? For the same age group, the percent in 2010 strongly disagreeing was almost one half, compared to the one third in 2020. So, more Christians than ever have no reason to share their faith with people of other religions. As the need for evangelism increases, the number of Christians who believe evangelism is even needed by people of other religions decreases.

The age group 18 to 29 saw 45% choosing a non-pluralist view in 2010 with that same age cohort (now 30 to 39) dropping to 35% in 2020. Once again, we see that as Born Again Christians are maturing, more of them are abandoning rather than clinging to the strong truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To counter this slide with the young adults we know, please:

1. Pray for the Lord to send laborers into the harvest, opening their to the infinite value of the gospel.

2. Explain that the chasm is so great only God can make a way of reconciliation. As Paul wrote, "*God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Jesus . . . who gave himself as a ransom for all . . .*"

{12}

3. Explain that your accepting pluralism will not get your non-Christian friends into heaven. Only the truth of Christ presented to them by willing lips has power over their eternal destiny.

Young Adults and Jesus Our Savior

Probe's new survey shows that professing to be born again does not equate to orthodox biblical beliefs. In this section, we will see this borne out in beliefs about Jesus Christ.

First, why did Jesus die on a cross? The Bible is clear Jesus chose the cross**. "He did it to redeem us by taking our sins and our punishment upon Himself."** Close to nine out of ten 18- to 39-year-old, Born Again Protestants selected this answer.{13} All Christian leaders should want their people to know Jesus' role in their redemption, even those with a works-based gospel. Yet less than two thirds of Other Protestants and Catholics selected that answer.

Many said either the Jewish or Romans leaders caused Jesus' death. But Christians should know that prior attempts by those groups were supernaturally thwarted.

Second, "Jesus will return to this earth to save those who await his coming."

This statement comes from scripture, " *. . . so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, . . . to save those eagerly waiting for him*."{14} As you can see, this verse answers both questions. The apostle Paul wrote, "*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first*."{15}

Around two thirds of Born Again Protestants strongly agree that Jesus will return to save. Apparently, the remaining

third are not sure.

For other Christian groups, only about one third of them strongly agreed.

The third question is: "When he lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people."

The Bible clearly states, "*God made the one who did **not know sin** to be sin for us so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God*."{16} God laid our sins upon Jesus in his earthly death. If Jesus were a sinner like you and I, His death would have been for His own sin.

Once again, about one third of Born Again Protestants did not select Disagree Strongly. Having this large group who don't understand biblical Christianity is disappointing.

Young adult Born Again Protestants drop down to about one half when looking at **all three questions together**. It appears the other half are trusting Jesus to save them, without a good understanding of who Jesus is. All other Christian groups drop to one in ten or less professing these truths about Jesus.

Finally, we find nine out of ten people with a Basic Biblical Worldview also select a biblical answer for the three Jesus questions. This shows a strong correlation between a Basic Biblical Worldview and an understanding of Jesus' purpose.

Are the Unaffiliated Uncommitted Christians?

In this section we will access Probe's 2020 survey to learn about those identifying as Agnostic or Nothing in Particular. We will call them AGNIPS. Perhaps, as some have suggested, a significant percentage are really Christians not affiliated with any denomination.

Among those ages 18 through 39, one in five are AGNIPS. About one third of these were Protestants as children but only three out of one hundred profess to being born again. So, it appears unlikely that any significant portion of the AGNIPS are latent Born Again Christians.

Of course, many people professing to be Christians do not qualify as Born Again. So perhaps many AGNIPS are latent Other Protestants or Catholics. Let's look at three different metrics to see if this proposition is supported by data.

First, look at a nominal level of religious activity: pray at least daily and read your Bible at least weekly. I think anyone not doing these has little interest in their faith. For this young adult segment, 35% of Born Again Christians and almost 30% of Other Protestants and Catholics *but* less than 5% of AGNIPS perform these activities. Compared to professing Christians, the AGNIPS have very few doing these activities.

Looking only at AGNIPS who were affiliated with a Protestant faith as a child, we find only 3% performing these activities.

A second metric: how about those who believe God is creator and active in the world and do not believe good works will get them into heaven? We find: 33% Born Again Christians, 4% Other Protestants and Catholics, around 0.5% of all AGNIPS and only 0.4% of AGNIPS with a childhood Protestant affiliation.

Finally, of those who strongly agrees with the statement, "I believe that the only path to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ." Once again: 64% of Born Again Christians, 28% of Other Protestants and Catholics, 5% of all AGNIPS and 5% of AGNIPS with a childhood Protestant affiliation.

All of these metrics agree that very few young adults who are Agnostics or Nothing in Particular appear to have latent Christian beliefs. Even those who were affiliated with a Protestant church as a child did not have a higher level of

affiliation with Christian beliefs.

Over this last decade, among Born Again Christians, a basic biblical worldview and understanding of Jesus is decreasing while pluralism is increasing. And the growing AGNIP population is far removed from Christian thought. Those who follow Christ, must respond by speaking the truth about Christ in our churches, our neighborhoods, and the world. We cannot expect any of these groups to just come back to a solid Christian belief. We must reach out to them.

Notes

1. Our new 2020 survey looks at Americans from 18 through 55 from all religious persuasions. Although still focused on looking at religious beliefs and attitudes toward cultural behaviors, we expanded the scope surveying 3,106 Americans ages 18 through 55. Among those responses, there are 717 who are Born Again allowing us to make meaningful comparisons with our 2010 results while also comparing the beliefs of Born Again Christians with those of other religious persuasions.
2. Our previous survey, the 2010 Probe Culturally Captive Christians survey, was limited to Born Again American's ages 18 through 40. This survey of 817 people was focused on a obtaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs and behaviors of young adult, Born Again Christian Americans. For a detailed analysis of the outcomes of our 2010 survey and other surveys from that decade, go to our book Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behavior of American Young Adults
3. General Social Survey data was downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the National Opinion Research Center.
4. Note that the Other Religions category includes Christian cults (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses), Jews, and other world religions.
5. Protestants who did not profess to being born again
6. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014, Religious Knowledge Survey 2019 Pew

Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

7. Other answers to select from:

   • God created but is no longer involved with the world today.
   • God refers to the total realization of personal human potential.
   • There are many gods, each with their different power and authority.
   • God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.
   • There is no such thing as God.
   • Don’t know

8. See for example 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15
9. 1 Peter 2:9
10. John 14:6
11. Acts 4:12
12. 1 Timothy 2:4-6
13. Other answers included:

   • He threatened the Roman authority’s control over Israel.
   • He threatened the stature of the Jewish leaders of the day.
   • He never died on a cross.
   • He failed in his mission to convert the Jewish people into believers.
   14. Hebrews 9:27-28 ESV
   15. 1 Thessalonians 4:16
   16. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NET

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Faith Trends in America: How Is Christianity Faring as We Enter the Third Decade of the 21st Century

In looking at the state of American Christianity, Steve Cable examines how handling data inaccurately can produce wildly varying conclusions.



Recent reports on the current state of Christianity in America could create emotional whiplash, making one feel elated one moment and depressed the next. People are quick to comment on survey results and their own experiences. Within the last year, we have run the gamut from Glenn Stanton's book, *The Myth of the Dying Church: How Christianity is Actually Thriving in America and the World*,{1} to a Pew Research article, *In U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*.{2}

These titles appear to represent two very different viewpoints. Which is it? Are we thriving or declining at a rapid pace?

Finding the answer requires one to thoughtfully articulate your question in at least two ways:

1. What do you mean by Christianity? Are you referring to all potential Christians both Protestant and Catholic or are you focused on a subset, such as Evangelicals? And,

2. Is anything beyond affiliation with a church necessary to be considered an active Christian? Examples might include a

biblical understanding of how one gets to heaven and belief in the Bible.

You also need to thoroughly understand the available survey data that might throw light on your question. You need to understand what questions are asked and how they are worded. Then you analyze the responses to the set of relevant questions to gain insight on your topic of interest. Remember, no survey asks the exact questions you would ideally use. That sounds like more work than most of you want to attempt. Unfortunately, most of the pundits writing today do not attempt to do that work either. Generally, they take fragmented data and attempt to draw intelligent inferences.

In this article, I have done this work for you, drawing primarily on data from the Pew Research Group and the General Social Survey. We will look at which groups are growing as a percent of our population and which groups are not. Both Pew and the GSS have taken surveys over an extended period of time, helping us identify trends in religious affiliation and beliefs.

As you will see, the picture is certainly not rosy, but perhaps better than you expect. Although the growth of non-Christian segments is continuing at a fairly rapid pace, Evangelical Christianity is only declining slightly as a percentage of the population. However, I will point out how some data has been misunderstood to paint either a rosier picture or a gloomier picture than the actual current state of affairs.

Evangelicals: Thriving or Declining

All surveys we have reviewed covering this century show the same general result: the percent of people claiming an affiliation with a Protestant or Catholic church has been declining.

GSS surveys{3} found across all ages the percentage who identify as Protestant or Catholic has dropped from 84% of the population in 1988 down to 69% in 2018. Looking only at Protestants (both Evangelical and Mainline), the drop was from 58% down to 46%. Considering those who are Millennials now, that is ages 18 to 34, we find a decline from 53% down to 36% over this thirty-year period. And the data does not show any leveling off in the rate of decline.

But we may ask, "Are Evangelicals participating in this general decline or are they thriving as some authors claim?"

The bottom-line answer is that Evangelicals are declining as a percent of the overall population but at a much slower rate. Across all ages, the percentage who identify as Evangelical has dropped from 30% to 28% over this twenty-year period. For those aged 18 to 34 the drop was from 29% to 25%. In October 2019, Pew released a report showing that from 2009 to 2018, the percentage of Evangelicals of all ages dropped from 28% to 25%, a significantly faster rate of decline.

Even with a slow rate of decline, if Evangelicals make up around 25% of the population, they can have a significant impact on American culture and life and perhaps begin to grow again.

However, does Evangelical affiliation equate to an active Evangelical practice? We need to know how many who affiliate with an Evangelical church *are active Christians* as opposed to just being affiliated if we want to truly assess the strength of the American Evangelical movement.

Using the GSS surveys, we can look for people who:

1. Know God really exists
2. Pray multiple times per day
3. Attend church at least twice a month
4. Believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, and
5. Call themselves a strong Christian

I think an active, evangelical Christian would have these basic beliefs and practices.

The percentage of the population who meet these criteria has dropped from about 9% down to just over 7% of the population over the last twenty years. This result is a large enough group to have some impact but not enough to crow about the growing Evangelical presence. We can say that Evangelical Christianity is certainly not thriving but clinging to a position of some relevance.

What's Happening with the Nones

Nones are people who state their religious affiliation is either atheist, agnostic or nothing at all.{4} The dramatic growth of the Nones has been an ongoing headline story.

Surveys{5} indicate the Nones were 8% of the population in 1988. By 2018 they had grown to over 23% of the population. For ages 18 through 29, they tripled from 13% to 35% of the population. No one denies this growth, but some question the importance of this trend.

For example, Glenn Stanton states, "(The Nones) are simply reporting their actual faith practices in more candid ways, largely due to new ways in which polling questions have been asked in the last ten years or so."{6} Oddly enough, he primarily relies on data from GSS for long term trends and they have asked exactly the same question regarding Nones since 1972.{7}

Some suggest Nones are primarily Christians who will return to the fold as they move into marriage and child rearing. Is there any indication that this is happening?

Well, in 2007, among those aged 18 to 32, 24% of them are classified as Nones. In 2014, for this same group now seven years older, 32% of them are Nones. As this group began rearing children, *a significantly larger percentage of them*

were Nones than when they were younger. Also, instead of attending church, only 4% of these Nones attend church more than once a month.

Instead of emerging adult Nones turning into church-attending Christians as they age, more of them are becoming Nones. It appears that the cultural pressures against Christianity are outweighing the tendency of prior generations returning to seek religious training for their children.

The Barna Group has found that there are genuine differences between Millennials and older generations that will not be removed as they age. As Dave Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, states in his book, *UnChristian,*{8} "I would caution you not to underestimate the widening gap between young people and their predecessors. Those who think that in due time Mosaics . . . will 'grow up' and look like everyone else should prepare to have unfulfilled expectations." Dave's comment is based on their analysis of multiple surveys covering thousands of individuals and a large number of in-depth interviews with young adults.

Are the Nons THE Major Growth Story?

Is the growth of nondenominational Christians a more important trend than the Nones? Glenn Stanton states, "Growth of nondenominational churches has been many times larger than the nones. . . it is not the rise of the nones that is the major story . . . It's the "nons" and not the nones that are mushrooming."{9}

This condition would be an amazing finding if true. However, it is not true for three major reasons which we will discuss today:

1. The percentage growth of the "nons" is *not many times larger*. From 2007 to 2014, "nons" grew their percentage of the population by 44%. But, Nones grew by almost the same

rate at 42%. Looking at absolute growth, the "nons" grew by four million people versus the Nones' 19 million—almost five times the number of "nons." The growth of the "nons" is relegated to a minor factor when compared to the Nones.

2. The "nons" are a subset of the Evangelicals. And Stanton states, "*Evangelicals* have benefited more from these ecclesiastical exoduses than anyone else. They even . . . *outpaced the nones*."{10} In fact, most of the "nons" growth came as a result of switching between evangelical denominations. Thus, any growth by the "nons" is offset by declines in other evangelical groups, resulting in an overall *decline of about 1*%. Evangelicals have not even come close to outpacing the Nones.

In fact, *for the first time, we have the total number of nones exceeding the number of Evangelicals in America*.

3. Stanton says, "It's the evangelical churches identifying as nondenominational that have been growing faster than any others including the nones and the atheists."{11} Taking a look at percentage growth, *the atheists and agnostics have shown the most explosive growth by far,* growing their numbers from 9 million in 2007 to 17.4 million in 2014—a growth of 92%—while the "nons" grew from 8 million to 12 million over the same time period, a growth of 56%. So perhaps Stanton meant to say, "It's the non-believers and not the Nones that are mushrooming."

In summary, the growth of the "nons" may be of interest to those who study the relative make-up of Evangelicals in America. But to those interested in how Evangelicals are doing as a whole it is not relevant. The fact that the "nons" are increasing just reflects some churning of affiliations within the Evangelical realm. On the whole, Evangelicals are decreasing at a slow, but steady pace.

Confusing Expansion with Same-Store Growth

A commercial enterprise may report sales growth. But the savvy investor wants to know why. Opening new stores may increase sales. But if it masks lower sales per existing store, it is a red flag. They are actually losing market share.

Similarly, with parachurch ministries, their number of locations gives little indication as to the health of Christianity. However, their growth rate per location can signal increased interest in Christianity.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked. For example, one pundit points to impressive growth by two respected student ministries in adding new locations as evidence to support an optimistic projection of Evangelical growth. However, they are not reporting an increased impact on a per site basis.

Looking at their annual reports,{12}{13} we see that one of them reports per location attendance *declining* at a rate of almost 1% per year over the last decade.{14} The other is declining even faster, reporting a growth rate of *negative* 3% per year.{15}

These declines could be caused by several different factors such as lower attendance at new locations, competition with other student groups, lower interest in their Christian message, etc. But we can be sure that these two ministries do not indicate an overall growth trend for Evangelicals.

Surveys and statistics can be very helpful in understanding the status of a ministry. However, we can be seriously misled by listening to those who do not know how to interpret the data contained in these sources.

Wrapping up our look at faith trends, in this article we saw:

1. American Evangelicals are declining slightly in the overall population with actively engaged Evangelicals holding about 7% of the population.
2. The Nones continue to grow and now exceed Evangelicals. Their growth clearly reflects the unimportance of religious affiliation among a large percentage of Americans.
3. The growth of Non-denominationals (although interesting) made no impact on the overall size of American Evangelicals and is less than the growth of atheists and agnostics.
4. Looking at growth per location of parachurch ministries is more important than growth in number of locations in assessing the growth of Christianity.

We live in a challenging time but Evangelical churches are strong enough to make a huge difference in America if we will follow the Holy Spirit's lead and present the eternal truth of the gospel in ways that communicate to today's "nothing in particular" culture.

Notes

1. Glenn Stanton, The Myth of the Dying Church (Franklin TN: Worthy Publishing), 2019.
2. Pew Research Center, In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, October 17, 2019.
3. General Social Surveys from 1988, 1998, 2018.
4. Terms used in the Pew Research Surveys; the GSS survey uses None to capture all of those responses and other surveys use variations of these approaches.
5. Ibid.
6. Stanton, p. 54.
7. General Social Surveys, 1972-2018: Cumulative Codebook, March 2019.
8. Dave Kinnaman and Dave Lyons, Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . And Why It Matters, Baker Books, 2007, p. 22.
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14. The years looked at were 2009 and 2017.
15. For Intervarsity, we looked at 2007 and 2017.

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A Christian Purpose for Life – Proclaiming the Glory of Christ

Steve Cable answers the question, Why does God leave Christians on earth after we are saved?

Misconceptions and Our Identity

Examining the beliefs and behavior of born-again emerging adults over the last few years, one common deficiency is a misunderstanding of their relationship to eternity. Many believers either have not thought about the question of "Why did God leave me here on earth once I was saved?" or they harbor misconceptions about the answer. Let's begin by considering some common misconceptions.



The first misconception is being purposeless. These people believe that thinking about their eternal purpose is a waste of time. Just live for the moment. My eternal destiny is secure so why bother myself with asking, "Why am I still here? I'll worry about the things of heaven after I die." This viewpoint devalues the sacrifice of Christ. He did not give His life for us so that we can be unconcerned about what concerns Him.{1}

The second misconception is focusing on this life's pleasures. Many young people say things like "I don't want Jesus to return until after I have traveled, married, had children, gotten that promotion, etc." They assume these things are of ultimate importance in their lives. Yet, the Bible teaches us that this attitude will choke out God's fruit in our lives. As Jesus said, "[T]he worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful."{2}

A third misconception is becoming prepared for heaven. Some think that God needs to get our character up to some entrance level requirement before we are ready to move on to heaven. Most people with this view are not really working hard to match their lifestyle to a biblical standard, but they figure at some point they will. However, since our righteousness is not our own, but rather that of Jesus',{3} we don't need to get more righteous to enter heaven. In fact, when we see Him then we will be like Him.{4} The fastest way to make us completely mature is to take us out of this world.

One final misconception is providing for one's family. Caring for our family is certainly part of God's desire for our lives. However, if our sole purpose is to provide for our own family and our children have the same purpose and so on, the church will be limited to us and our progeny—and no one else.

These common misconceptions as to our purpose fall under the

warning Paul gave us in Philippians,

> For many walk, of whom I often told you, . . . that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, . . . whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.{5}

Paul goes on to explain, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . ."{6}

We are to live our lives constantly aware of our heavenly citizenship, eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord. In this article, we examine the book of 1 Peter to see what Peter has to say about our purpose in life and how we are to live it out.

Called to a Critical Mission

Peter begins the book of 1 Peter by reminding us what Christ has done for us. Let's read the first few verses of this amazing letter.

According to his great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Through the resurrection of Jesus we are born again and are looking forward to an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us to be revealed in the last time. What a wonderful truth helping us to realize that we are already living in eternity as we wait for our inheritance to be revealed. In the meantime, we are living on this earth in a temporary "earthsuit" called to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

In the remainder of his letter to the churches, Peter

addresses what we are to do while we are living on this earth. He first tells us that we are likely to encounter trials and suffering in this world. Then, beginning with verse 13 of chapter 1, Peter conveys to us the importance of our mission, giving us instructions we would expect a military commander to give before sending his team out on a dangerous and critical mission. He tells us to:

> *Prepare our minds for action* – we are to be action oriented, not passively waiting for our life to pass by.
>
> *Be alert and focused on the mission* – we are to keep our minds focused on God's purpose for our life on this earth.
>
> *Keep a long term perspective* – don't be deceived into putting your thoughts and your hope on the temporary temptations of the world, and
>
> *Realize God has entrusted you with the priceless resource of time* – Peter tells us that we are to conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord while we are on this earth.

In the latter parts of chapter 1, Peter reminds us that we have been redeemed at a very high cost, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. We owe a tremendous debt which motivates us to desire to faithfully carry out our mission on this earth.

The calls to action listed above must be accompanied by two critical components to be effective in this life. Specifically, Peter calls on us to purify our hearts not conforming to our former lusts and to love other believers not only as a friend, but also with sacrificial love by which Jesus loves you. The actions listed above are not our purpose on this earth, but rather activities we need to address if we are fulfill our purpose.

Our Purpose: To Proclaim His Excellencies

Why does God leaves us on this earth after we are saved? In the second chapter of his letter, Peter begins by reminding us that we are living stones, part of the holy building God is building on the cornerstone Jesus Christ. This building made up of the lives of Christians is to be a beacon proclaiming the glory of God and the good news of redemption in Jesus.

In verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 2, Paul clearly states the purpose of our lives and of the church when he writes:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are a special people on this earth, God's own people. Peter uses the terms used by Yahweh of the Israelites in the wilderness where God told them through Moses,

> Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.{7}

The Israelites discovered that they could not obey His voice or keep His covenant even when ruled by kings who desired to serve the Lord. Jesus Christ had to "become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God through Him."{8} In Jesus' righteousness, we now become the special people of God given His purposes to accomplish on this earth.

We are left here so that we may proclaim His excellencies. We are to proclaim more than just the general attributes of our Creator. We are to let people know that our Creator is prepared to deliver them out of darkness and let them live in

His marvelous light. God has entrusted us with His glory, His light. We have the privilege of proclaiming His glory and offering His grace. At a basic level, we proclaim His excellencies by obeying His commands to proclaim Christ, make disciples, and be available for God to use us on this earth.

If we are to proclaim the glories of Christ and the gospel of redemption to eternal life, how are we to accomplish this wonderful goal?

Fulfilling Our Purpose Through Excellent Behavior and Right Relationships

In this article we have been looking at the question, "What purpose does God have for my life as a Christian here on planet Earth?" We have seen that God leaves us here primarily for the purpose of bringing others into His kingdom. As Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . if I am to remain on in the flesh if will mean fruitful labor for me."{9} In his letter to the Colossians, Paul stated, "We proclaim [Christ] by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ."{10} The apostle Peter put it this way, "[You are] a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."{11}

If we are to proclaim Christ in this world, the next obvious question is, how are we to do this? Is the best approach to rent a large electronic bull horn and drive the streets preaching the good news? Or in today's world perhaps we can start a Facebook page or send out a tweet with John 3:16? These techniques may be appropriate in some circumstances, but that is not where the apostle Peter says we should begin.

Peter follows his statement that we are called to proclaim Christ with this interesting instruction:

> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.{12}

Instead of following this primary purpose with instructions on how to best verbalize our faith, he first focuses on how we live out our faith. He clearly points out that our behavior if kept excellent in purity and good deeds will attract the attention of non-Christians, of evil doers, causing them to consider the work of Christ in this world. We see that the reason God calls us to excellent behavior is not so that we will be good enough to get into His heaven, but rather to convict others of their need for a savior.

Peter continues to address ways in which we should proclaim Christ in the remainder of the second chapter. He points out that having godly relationships is an important way of proclaiming Christ. What types of relationships does Peter address? He specifically calls out our relationships with unbelievers, government authorities, our bosses, our co-workers, husbands and wives, other believers and the elders He has placed over us.

Relationships are the biggest part of life. As people observe your relationships, they can see that they are different because you offer supernatural love, and your eternal perspective allows you to approach them with a servant's heart. As Christians, our relationships are not about getting what we deserve, but rather about giving to others the same way Jesus has given to us.

Fulfilling Your Purpose Through Your

Testimony and Your Prayers

Above we have seen that our post-salvation purpose of life on earth is to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ through the gospel. We also looked at the first two ways that we should use to proclaim Christ in this world. The first way is through excellent behavior lived out before an unbelieving world. The second is through living out right relationships with those with whom we deal in this world. As you can see, these first two ways that Peter addresses do not require us to explain our faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, they draw unbeliever's attention to our lives, building up questions in their minds.

For example, in 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter tells us,

> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Having a good attitude toward our boss even in those times when they are unreasonable finds favor with God and testifies to others of our different perspective.

After dealing with a comprehensive list of life relationships, from the government to our husbands and wives, Peter brings up our spoken testimony as well. In 3:15, he says:

> Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Not only are we to live our lives in ways that proclaim the glories of our Savior, we are to be prepared to give an

account for the hope that is in us. We know from the first chapter of 1 Peter that the hope that is in us is the hope that comes from being born again and knowing that we have obtained an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. We need to be prepared to share with others that through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ they too can share in this same hope that drives our lives. The phrase in the verse, to make a defense, is a translation of the Greek world *apologia* from which we obtain our English word "apologetics."

It is important to note the context in which this call to apologetics is placed. First, it is to be done with gentleness and reverence, not with arrogance and self-righteousness. The object is not to demonstrate you are right, but rather to help the questioner come to grips with the truth of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, Peter reiterates his instruction found in 2:12, reminding us that we are to focus on living sanctified lives so that even those who slander us know in their hearts of our good behavior in Christ.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:7, we are called to be "of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." If we are to be effective in proclaiming Christ in this world we must be consistently praying about the people and the obstacles we face.

Peter makes it clear that our purpose as a church on this earth is to proclaim the goodness of Christ who delivered us out of the domain of darkness and into the eternal kingdom of God. Proclaiming Christ in this way involves our excellent behavior, our right relationships, our gentle defense of the gospel, and a commitment to prayer. Let us examine our lives to see how this call is being lived out in us.

Notes

1. 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 1 Peter 1:13-17

2. Mark 4:19

3. Philippians 3:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:21

4. 1 John 3:3

5. Philippians 3:18-19

6. Philippians 3:20-21

7. Exodus 19:5-6

8. 2 Corinthians 5:20

9. Philippians 1:21-23

10. Colossians 1:28 NET Bible

11. 1 Peter 2:9b NET Bible

12. 1 Peter 2:11-12

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Probe Survey 2020 Report 7: American Views on Morals, Politics and Social Justice in 2020

Steve Cable discusses Probe's survey findings on these topics. He reveals that most Born Again Protestants are not looking to the Bible for help in moral choices and do not think they should let their Christian faith impact their political positions.

Continuing our series examining the results from Probe's 2020 survey on American religious beliefs and behaviors, we will consider three topics that are important to any society:

1. What most influences your **moral choices**? Our survey shows that among adults under 40, less than half of those claiming to be Born Again Protestants{1} look to biblical teachings as their primary resource for moral choices. Even among the minority group who look to the Bible, less than half of them would apply a biblical view of monogamous behavior to their choices regarding sex outside of marriage.

2. Do you mix your **religious views with your political views**? Almost two thirds of Born Again Protestants under 40 agree that one should not let your religious faith impact your political positions. As a Christian, we are to take every thought captive in obedience to Christ{2} who is the source of real truth. Every position we take in every area of life should be informed by our faith in Christ.

3. Where do you learn how to bring about **justice across our society**? While our government and educational leaders are pushing schools to take action and teach principles of justice without even telling the parents, over two thirds of younger adult Americans across all religious backgrounds believe that parents should be the primary source in teaching ways to stand for justice in our society.

If you have a society where 1) moral questions are answered by popular opinion rather than the Bible, 2) religious faith has no place in informing one's political stances, and 3) social justice training is left to the state, you are in danger of becoming a totalitarian state where all thinking is controlled for the benefit of the government or some other power bloc within your society. In an alternative society where 1) moral guidance is provided by consulting biblical teaching, 2) one can bring their religion's teaching into the domain of political discourse, and 3) your thinking on social justice is

informed by your religious beliefs, you are in danger of having a democracy where everyone is allowed to develop and express their opinion.

Let’s examine our survey results in more detail to see where American adults stand on these topics.

Making Moral Choices

Our first question deals with where people go for guidance in making moral choices, as laid out below:

When you are faced with a personal moral choice, which one of the following statements best describes how you will most likely decide what to do?

1. Do what makes the most people happy.
2. Do what your family or friends would expect you to do.
3. Do what you believe most people would do under similar circumstances.
4. Do what biblical principles teach.
5. Do what seems right to me at the time.
6. Do what will produce the best outcome for yourself.
7. Other

For our analysis, we combined answers 1, 2 and 3 as answers where people are looking to see what other people think. Across all Americans ages 18 through 55, almost four in twenty (20%) people selected one of those three answers{3}. However, those 40 and over were less likely to select one of those three answers, at only about three in twenty (15%). Those under age 40 saw closer to five in twenty (23%) select one of those three.

Let’s look more closely at respondents from ages 18 through 39. Key parts of the results are summarized in the table below.

Source of Moral Decisions	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
What other people think	15%	24%	29%	20%
What seems right to me	27%	40%	40%	58%
Sum of first two sources	42%	64%	69%	78%
Biblical principles	47%	22%	12%	3%

First consider Born Again Protestants; we see that almost half (47%) look to biblical principles for guidance. That result is somewhat encouraging although possibly misleading, as we will explore below. The encouragement is tempered by the fact over half of them are not primarily looking at biblical principles for moral guidance. This includes over four out of ten (42%) who look to others or to what seems best to them.

The Unaffiliated{4} group are clearly not aligned with evangelical Christian values, with less than three out of 100 (2.7%) looking to biblical principles for guidance. Almost eight in ten (78%) look to others or to what seems best to them.

It is not surprising to most that the Unaffiliated would answer this question differently than Born Again Protestants. What about other Christians who might look to the Bible for moral guidance. As Evangelicals, we often think these other Christians are presenting Jesus as an example for moral living rather than as the one and only source for redemption through His sacrifice. But, for Other Protestants and Catholics, we find two thirds (64%/69%) of them saying they look to others or to what seems best to them for their moral compass. In contrast, Other Protestants show just over one in five (22%) looking to biblical principles, while Catholics are around one in ten (12%

Do Born Again Protestants Really Do What They Say?

Almost half of Born Again Protestants say they use biblical principles to make moral choices. With this survey, we can see if their actions match their stated approach to moral decisions. Specifically, let's look at those who claim to use biblical principles and see if they applied those to their ideas about sexuality. Let's use two questions on which the Bible provides clear moral guidance.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly

2. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:

    a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
    b. Makes sense in today's cultural environment.
    c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
    d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

The Bible clearly states that fornication (sex between people who are not married to each other) is always a mistake. Thus, they should select Agree Strongly for the first question. Living with someone in a sexual relationship is also fornication. They should select answer d. for that question. For our discussion, we will call someone who answered these two questions as shown a **Supporter of Sexual Purity**.

Now let's look at how these two questions on sexual morality relate to the answer on moral choices in the table below.

Specific Question or Combination of Questions	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant

1.	Use Biblical Principles for Moral Choices	47%	22%
2.	Supporter of Sexual Purity	25%	3.7%
3.	Use Biblical Principles (1) **and** Support Sexual Purity (2)	21%	3.1%
4.	% of those who Use Biblical Principles who also Support Sexual Purity (Row3/Row 1)	45%	14%
5.	% of those who Support Sexual Purity who also Use Biblical Principles (Row 3/ Row 2)	85%	82%

I realize that your eyes may have glazed over when looking over this table. So, let me explain the primary result. In Row 4, we see 45% under the Born Again Protestant column. This means that less than half of the Born Again Protestants who said they used Biblical Principles in making moral choices ALSO selected the biblical position on the two questions relating to fornication. For the other Protestants it was much worse, with only one in seven (14%) selecting to Support Sexual Purity.

What do we make of this disconnect? Either those whose supported Biblical Principles picked areas where they chose not to apply Biblical Principles OR those who supported Biblical Principles do not understand what the Bible says about sexual purity. Both of those choices are a disconcerting view of the fractured worldviews held by many Born Again Protestants.

We also note in row 5, that almost all of those who select to Support Sexual Purity also said they would use Biblical Principles in making moral choices. This figure seems to show

that those who do not use Biblical Principles are much more consistent in rejecting biblical morality.

Religion and Politics

The second question deals with how we relate our religious thinking and our political thinking. The question asked was:

Just as the government should not be involved in the internal workings of churches, Christians should not let their faith impact their position on how government functions. Responses from Agree Strongly to **Disagree Strongly**.

A person's understanding of religious principles should drive their thinking on any political questions which intersect with a religious principle. We should expect not only Christians but people of every religion to disagree strongly with this statement. For a genuine Christian, their faith in Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Bible are the foundation for all of their beliefs. As Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)." If we want to apply truth to our position on how government functions, we must look to the source of real truth, Jesus.

Christians can genuinely disagree about the best way to achieve certain objectives. For example, we know Jesus calls us to show concern for the poor and for widows and orphans. However, we may disagree on the best way to carry this out within the structure of our society. But any political approach we choose to support should not contradict our underlying faith position related to the issue at hand.

We can see how people responded to this question in the table below.

Faith should not impact positions regarding government issues	Age Range	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated

Strongly Disagree	18 – 39	21%	6%	8%	5%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree		39%	19%	23%	14%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	40 – 55	58%	23%	26%	20%

Looking at Born Again Protestants, this group is much more likely than other groups to strongly Disagree or Disagree with the statement.

Among those ages 18 to 39, we see that about one in five (21%) Strongly Disagree and close to four out of ten (39%) Disagree or Strongly Disagree. A significant number appear to realize that you cannot segregate your faith beliefs from your beliefs about how our government should operate. However, for this age group, the vast majority, almost two out of three (61%), either agree with the statement or don't know. This majority buys into the lie that their religious faith should not impact their political beliefs.

Secondly, we see a significant difference in the answers based on the age of the Born Again Protestants. For those ages 40 through 55, we find almost six out of ten (58%) disagree or strongly disagree. Younger adults have been brought up in a society that constantly warns them to leave their religious beliefs at home. Do not bring them to the public square as they are not welcome or appropriate. Those over the age of 40 are much more likely to reject this popular mantra and bring their religious beliefs into the political arena.

Of those Born Again Protestants under the age of 40 who say that **their faith has a significant impact on their daily lives**, over two thirds (70%) of them also say **they make moral choices relying on biblical principles**. This is a consistent result, for if faith has a significant impact on your daily life, one would expect it to impact your moral choices. But at the same time, less than one third (29%) of these Born Again Protestants with faith important in their daily lives said

they strongly disagreed with the statement that our faith should not impact our political positions. Clearly some combination of the news media, secular education and politicians have succeeded in misguiding Americans on this topic. **Many have bought into the false model that political positions are not moral decisions**.

Finally, let's note that significantly less than one out of ten people who are not Born Again Protestants strongly disagreed with the statement. Other Protestants and Catholics are not distinctly different than the Unaffiliated this muddled thinking.

Bringing About Social Justice

Most Americans probably want a fair and just society where law abiding citizens have fair access to opportunity and can apply themselves
toward achieving their life goals. However, there are many different ideas on how to best achieve such an objective. So, we asked this question:

Matters of social injustice like racial prejudice and bullying are best remedied by (rank from 1, most important to 5, least important):

1. Government laws and penalties
2. Churches teaching on how to live with and treat others
3. Parents overtly teaching their children how to treat others
4. Parents showing their children by example
5. School curricula focused on correct social thinking

As noted in the question, respondents were asked to rank the five responses rather than pick the best one. We did this because we felt that many people would have more than one approach they considered important.

Let's begin by considering the options that were ranked as

most important. In our evaluation, we combined the two options featuring parents as one item.

First Choice	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Parental Guidance	69%	53%	66%	73%
Church Teaching	21%	19%	19%	8%
Government Laws	9%	15%	9%	11%
School curricula	1%	14%	6%	8%

As shown, parental guidance was by far the most popular choice across all religious backgrounds averaging about two thirds of the responses. Except for the Unaffiliated, church teaching was a distant second, polling about one out of five for the other religious groupings.

Let’s consider the other extreme, the response selected as their least favorite choice by our respondents. Except for the Unaffiliated, the least popular option was school curricula focusing on correct social thinking. This option was selected last by about four out of ten respondents across all of the religious groups. Naturally, more than half of the Unaffiliated selected Church Teaching as their least favorite choice. For Born Again Protestants, government laws were selected as least favorite at almost the same level as school curricula.

As you can see, most Americans would say that remedying social injustice required parental involvement while school curricula was the least popular option. Thus, it is very interesting that many politicians and educators want to make the school the primary place for remedying social injustice while protecting the students from the poor examples of their parents. This may well be why that at the time this is being written that some school boards are seeing a significant

change in their make up as pro-parental rights candidates are being elected.

Notes

1. Born Again Protestants affiliate with a Protestant denomination, have had an experience with Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today, and state they will go to heaven because they confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.
2. 2 Corinthians 10:5
3. Each of the three answers accounted for about 7% of the respondents.
4. The Unaffiliated include atheists, agnostics and those who believe nothing in particular.

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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood (Radio Transcript)

Steve Cable examines the faulty reasoning and interpretation of the Bible in Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek *article "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin."*

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Wallace, addressing our strong confidence in our modern translations, mentioned others presenting a false view of this situation. One example, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald{1}, appeared in *Newsweek*. This article

presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.{2}



Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, "A Pew Research poll in 2010{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with **the New Testament and Jesus's teachings**."{4}

He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only **two of the twelve related to the New Testament** and **none to Jesus's teachings**.{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone's knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were "Name the four gospels" and "Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?" 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a "smidgen higher" must mean almost three times as many.

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today's translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today's popular translations{6} and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts.{7} Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, "We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature."{8}

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let's examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

First, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that "careful readers have long known that the two stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other."{9}

However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, "what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment."{10}

In his third creation model "the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab."{11}

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says "under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed." Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald's claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

His second claim states the Gospel of John was written "when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus's death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,"{12} implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, "The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus." While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death.{13} In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation.{14} We find similar verses in Matthew{15} and Mark{16}. All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.

In a third supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, "As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there."{17}

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called "contradictions" all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation Part 1

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out "the word homosexual didn't even exist until . .

. 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up."{18}

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words{19} defines the Greek word he questions as "a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . ."

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because "Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy."{20}

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars{21} do not agree it is a forgery.{22} Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, "So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government."

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.{23} Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, "plenty of fundamentalist Christians who

have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus."{24}

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out "a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible."{25} As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, "The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation."{26} He says this is contrary to Paul's message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God's kingdom "our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews){27}." We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."{28} Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, "Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are."{29} The apostles and the whole church agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.{30} Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication{31}, a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has "eight verses condemning those who criticize the government."{32} Pat Robertson sinned by stating, "We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president."

Actually, Romans says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God."{33} We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech."{34} So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Faulty Interpretation Part 3

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will

conclude by looking at prayer. In his *Newsweek* article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally{35} saying, "(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America." He claimed Perry "heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do."

In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others."

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples,{36} and before over 5,000 people.{37} Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord's prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord's prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is "to be seen." This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete,

shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace concludes, "But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald's . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar."{38}

If Eichenwald's article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don't know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin," *Newsweek* Magazine, December 2014.
2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald's article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, "Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek's Tirade against the Bible," blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, "Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek Article on the Bible," blogpost December 2014.
3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.
4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:

    1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
    2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
    3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?

Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?

4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . ., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.
7. Insert summary on 1 John 5:7, Luke 22:20, and Luke 24:51.
8. Wallace.
9. Ibid, paragraph .
10. New English Translation, Genesis 59 Chapter 2, Notes 9 and 11.
11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
12. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
13. See Luke 23:4,14,22.
14. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.
15. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.
16. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.
17. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.

18. Ibid, paragraph 68.
19. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
21. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.
22. In Daniel Wallace, *Intro to 1st Timothy*, Dr. Wallace writes, "In sum, although the evidence against the authenticity of the pastorals is as strong as any evidence against the authenticity of any NT book, it still cannot overthrow the traditional view. The traditional view, however, must be modified by the substantial linguistic evidence against authenticity: an amanuensis (possibly Luke) had great freedom in writing these letters for the apostle Paul."
23. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement.
24. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.
26. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
27. Matthew 5:20.
28. Matthew 5:48.
29. Acts 15:10-11.
30. For example in Mt 5:xx, Luke x;xx, John x:xx, Romans x:xx, Ephesians x:xx, Phil x:xx, 1 Peter x:xx, 1 John x:xx.
31. Acts 15:20,29.
32. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
33. Romans 13:1,2.
34. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.
35. Houston 2011.
36. John chapter 17.
37. Luke chapter 9.
38. Wallace, paragraph ??.

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