The Qur’an From a Christian Perspective

Steve Cable provides a biblical understanding of Islam’s holy book, drawing on James White’s book What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an {1}. *Christians interacting with Muslims will benefit from a basic understanding of the development and the teaching of the Qur’an.*

Introduction and Background



Beginning with the basics, we need to understand how the Qur’an came into our possession and how it is viewed by most Muslims. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in Mecca around AD 570 and began to receive instruction leading to the religion of Islam at the age of 40 in AD 610. “The classical belief is that while [the Qur’an’s] entirety was “sent down” in one night, the Night of Power, but Muhammad himself received it piecemeal over twenty-two years.”{2} Muhammad did not receive a written version as Joseph Smith claimed to have received for the Book of Mormon. Rather he memorized what was told him by the Angel Gabriel and passed it on to certain followers.

The popular Muslim belief is summarized in a recent guide to Islam as follows: “The Qur’an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn, memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad. . . . Not one letter of the Qur’an has been changed over the centuries.”{3}

“From the position of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, the Qur’an is as eternal as Allah himself. It is the very Word of God, without even the slightest imperfection. The finger of man has no place in it, as the book held reverently in the hand today is an exact copy of a tablet in heaven upon which the Qur’an has been written from eternity past.”{4}

How this view holds up to a critical review of the history of Muhammad and the early days of Islam following his death will be addressed later in this document. For now it is important to understand that to a devout Muslim, the Qur’an in its original Arabic is above analysis and above question, for it is a matter of faith that it has been perfectly transmitted and maintained. Note the Qur’an exists only in Arabic. Even though most Muslims depend upon a translation for their access to the teachings of the Qur’an, Muslims still would say the Qur’an itself is not translatable and the public prayers must also be done in Arabic.

It is interesting to realize that the Qur’an in multiple places states that Allah “sent down the Torah and the Gospel” as works that serve as guidance to mankind. One cannot help but wonder, why God would send down the Torah and the Gospels when the Qur’an existed from eternity past and according to Muslim thought supersedes and corrects misconceptions men developed from reading these earlier texts. Why didn’t God protect the Gospels in the same way as the Qur’an?

In what follows, we will look at where teachings of the Qur’an are counter to the truth of the Bible and to the historical facts. We will also consider how the current Qur’an came into existence, asking why the creator of the world would pass down his truth in such an uncontrolled fashion.

The Qur’an and Biblical Beliefs

Most Muslims, if they know anything about Christianity, will

point to three primary problems with our faith:

1. the Trinity,
2. the resurrection of Jesus, and
3. the corruption of the Scriptures.

Is there anything taught in the Qur'an that causes them to reject the Christian concept of trinity?

In his book, James White describes the key Islamic belief in this way, "Ask any sincere follower what defines Islam, and they will answer quickly *tawhid*, the oneness of Allah, as expressed in Islam's great confession, "I profess that there is only one God worthy of worship and Muhammad is His messenger." . . . Without *tawhid*, you have no Islam."{5}

Interestingly, the word *tawhid* in that form does not appear in the Qur'an just as the word trinity does not appear in the Bible. They are words to describe a concept clearly taught in those two books. The difference between these two words is a major difference between these religions. The Islamic concept of tawhid is that Allah **has only** and **can only** exist in one form, the creator of the universe. The Christian understanding is that the one God is expressed in three ways or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All the persons of God were involved in the creation of this universe and reflect the full nature of God. The Bible is very clear that the Trinity is one God as shown for example in 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6:

> "There is no God but one . . . for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

In Islam, the most feared of all sins is called *shirk*, associating anyone, or anything with Allah. A person who dies in this state of idolatry cannot be forgiven. In Islamic thought, Allah is free to forgive any other sin if he so desires, but he will not forgive anyone who dies in idolatry.

This teaching causes the Trinity to become an unforgivable sin for Christians. “Many Muslims believe that the doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the worship of Jesus is an (unforgivable) act of *shirk*. This has led many of them to conclude that Christians, as a group, are bound for hell.”{6}

The Qur’an attempts to address the Trinity but does it show knowledge of the concept so that the criticisms offered are accurate and meaningful? “The reason for the question is self-evident: If the Qur’an is the very words of Allah without admixture of man’s insights or thoughts, then it would follow inevitably that its representations will be perfectly accurate and its arguments compelling.”{7}

What does the Qur’an say about the Trinity? First, it holds up monotheism as the correction for the false Christian claim of the “three.” By holding to this concept of the “three,” Christians are actually polytheists, denying that God is one. The author of the Qur’an does not understand that Christians are saying there is one God who manifests in three distinct forms or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the misunderstanding goes much further than this. The Qur’an is very clear that the “three” are the Father, the Son, and Mary. As stated in Surah 5:116,

> And when Allah said: “O Jesus son of Mary! Did you say to mankind: ‘Take me and my mother for two gods other than Allah?’” He said: “Transcendent are you! It was not mine to say that of which I had no right. . .”

And this view is reiterated in the Islamic commentaries, the *hadith*. “Nothing in the Qur’anic text actually addresses the essence of Christian faith, even though it is painfully clear the author thought he was doing so.”{8}

White believes this distinction helps us respond to the oft-asked question, “Is Allah the same god as Yahweh?” Although Muslims make reference to the one God of Abraham, they deny

the witness of the incarnation and the resurrection. Thus denying the entirety of the Christian faith. “If worship is an act of truth, then Muslims and Christians are not worshiping the same object. We do not worship the same God.”{9}

So, we see the Qur’an misrepresents the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and relegates Allah to a lower status than omnipotent God by declaring that Allah is not capable of appearing in multiple forms.

The Qur’an, Jesus and Salvation

As we consider what Muslims are taught in the Qur’an, we next look at the second stumbling block in their view of Christianity: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Qur’an has quite a bit to say about Jesus as a prophet of God, specifically stating He was not God and was not crucified. The name of Jesus appears 25 times in the Qur’an, almost always as *Isa ibn Mariam*, i.e. Jesus the son of Mary. Jesus is presented as the result of a miraculous virgin birth. In the Qur’an, Surah 3:47, it is written, “She said, My Lord! How can I have a child, when no man has touched me? He replied, “such is the will of Allah. He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He only says: ‘Be!’ and it is.”{10}

The question of how Jesus came to be is an important topic for comparison. First, we see the Qur’an says that Allah created Jesus by declaring His existence and having Him born of a virgin. Second, we understand that the author of the Qur’an believed Christians teach that Jesus came into being as the child of a physical, sexual union between God and Mary. Third, Christianity actually teaches that Jesus was the preexistent creator of the universe (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17), always and fully God, who became fully man being born of a virgin. Note that the primary difference between the Qur’an’s

view of Jesus' birth and a biblical view of Jesus' birth is not the role of Mary, but rather the Qur'an says that Jesus was created at His human conception and the Bible clearly states that Jesus is eternal and was not created but rather took on a new form at his birth:

> Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The words attributed to Jesus in the Qur'an, beginning with words spoken from the crib, are not found in any source from the 1st through 5th centuries. "But the Muslim understanding is that no such historical foundation is needed for lengthy portions of narrative for its words to be true. This is the Qur'an. It has been preserved. For the large majority, that ends the discussion, even when the same believers will then embrace historical criticism to question the value of His words in the Gospels."{11}

When it comes to the cross, the Qur'an stands firmly and inalterably against the mass of historical evidence and the almost universal view of the populace of itsday. This Qur'anic view is not sprinkled throughout the teaching, but rather appears in only one verse, namely Surah 4:157–

> "They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them; and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge of it except the pursuit of a conjecture; [but] certainly they slew him not. But Allah raised him up to Himself."

This verse stands alone in the Qur'an and surprisingly without commentary in the hadith literature as well. This verse, written six hundred years after the events, in a place far

removed from Jerusalem, takes a position counter to the gospel texts from the first century and counter to six centuries of Christian teaching. In more recent times, various Muslim apologists have surmised various tales to build upon this one verse. For example, some Muslims believe that someone else died on the cross and Jesus fled to India to continue his ministry there.{12} Regardless of what unsubstantiated fairy tales one conjures up to support its claim, this verse is based on no historical knowledge of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"This suggests the author did not have even the slightest knowledge of the centrality of God's redeeming act in Christ on the cross. . . The Qur'an places itself, and all who would believe in it, in direct opposition not only to the Gospels but also everything history itself says on the subject. The question must be asked: Who, truly, is following mere conjecture here? Those who were eyewitnesses on the Hill of the Skull outside Jerusalem? Or the author of the Qur'an, more than half a millennium later?"{13}

Without the cross, salvation in the Qur'an comes through an unknowable mixture of predestination, good works, and the capricious will of Allah. "In Islam, forgiveness is an impersonal act of arbitrary divine power. In Christianity, forgiveness is a personal act of purposeful and powerful yet completely just divine grace."{14}

One cannot attribute these differences between the Qur'an and the New Testament to a minor corruption of the biblical text as they reflect the core themes of these books.

Corrupting the Gospels

As discussed above, most Muslims have been taught there are three primary problems with our faith: the Trinity, the resurrection of Jesus, and the corruption of the scripture. We

have dealt with the Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus. Now let us turn to the corruption of scripture.

Most Muslims will affirm to you that the Christian scriptures cannot be relied upon because they have been changed and corrupted over the years and do not reflect the true message of Jesus. But is this affirmation what is taught by the Qur'an, and does it have any basis other than hearsay?

The Qur'an is very clear that the messages sent to the prophets of the Bible are to be believed. For example, Surah 3:84 says, "We believe in Allah . . . and that which was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrendered." Or as stated in a hadith, "Therefore, faithful Muslims believe in every Prophet whom Allah has sent and in every Book He revealed, and never disbelieve in any of them."{15}

Very clearly, the Qur'an states that what was given to the Old Testament prophets and to Jesus was the truth of God. It is not just the prophets themselves who were from the Lord, for the Qur'an states that Allah "sent down the Torah and the Gospel" as works that serve as "guidance to mankind." If this is the case, why do Muslims not interpret the Qur'an in light of the truth from the Gospels, assuming that Allah's truth never changes?

In contrast, it is a virtual pillar of Islamic orthodoxy to hold that the Bible has undergone significant revisions so much as to make them totally unreliable and thus, useless to a modern day Muslim. As James White puts it, "Muslims around the world are taught that the Jews and the Christians altered their Scriptures, though there is no agreement as to when this took place. If anything unites Islamic apologists, it is the persistent assertion of Qur'anic perfection in contrast to the corrupted nature of the Bible, particularly the New

Testament."{16}

This position certainly makes sense from a human perspective. For if one takes the position presented by the Qur'an that we are to believe every word of the Bible, then the huge differences between the theology of the New Testament and the theology of the Qur'an leave one little choice: either reject the Qur'an as not from God, or assume that all of the differences are the result of some massive corruption of the message of the Bible. The normal assumption taught to Muslims today is this corruption happened early on, perhaps even with the apostle Paul.

However, the preponderance of verses in the Qur'an which address this issue point to the corruption as being a distortion of the meaning (not the words) of the text. One example is found in Surah 3:78, "And there is a party of them who distort the Book with their tongues, that you may think that what they say is from the Book, when it is not from the Book." As White observes, "We must conclude that the now predominant claim of the biblical texts themselves, having undergone major alteration and corruption, is a later polemical and theological perspective not required by the Qur'anic text itself. It comes not from the positive teachings of Muhammad but through the unalterable fact of the Qur'anic author's unfamiliarity with the actual biblical text."{17}

As noted by a Christian, Al-Kindi, writing to a Muslim around AD 820, "The situation is plain enough; you witness to the truth of our text—then again you contradict the witness you bear and allege that we have corrupted it; this is the height of folly."{18}

In Surah 5:47, we are urged as Christians to judge by what Allah has revealed in the Gospels. If this admonition has any meaning at all, it must assume that Christians had access to a valid gospel in the 7th century during the life of Muhammad.

What Christians had as the Gospels in the 7th century is what we have as the Gospels today. In fact, "each canonical gospel we read today we can document to have existed in that very form three centuries before Muhammad's ministry. A Christian judging Muhammad's claims by the New Testament and finding that he was ignorant of the teachings of the apostles, ignorant of the cross, the resurrection . . . and meaning of the gospel itself, is simply doing what the Qur'an commands us to do in this text."{19}

Thus, while modern Muslims claim the Bible is corrupt and unreliable, the Qur'an appears to teach that the scriptures available to Jews and Christians during Muhammad's day were correct and should be followed; as long as one did not reinterpret the meaning into something that was not really said. However, doing so would lead one to the conclusion that the Qur'an was written by someone who was not knowledgeable concerning Jewish and Christian scripture.

The Perfection of the Qur'an

As noted earlier, one of the primary objections Muslims voice toward Christianity is their belief that our Scriptures have been changed and corrupted while the Qur'an in Arabic is exactly the words given to Muhammad fourteen hundred years ago. Does this belief stand up to impartial scrutiny?

The modern Muslim view of the Qur'an does not allow for the critical examination of sources and variations as has been done for the New Testament. Many bible scholars such as Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Daniel Wallace{20}, point out that the large number of ancient manuscripts from different locations and times give us a richness of sources allowing us to identify the original text of the Christian New Testament with a high degree of confidence. Muslims on the other hand are relying on a specific follower, Uthman the third Caliph, who was purported to have assimilated the correct version and

to have ordered the destruction of all other versions.

If the Qur'an is a perfect representation of the message from Allah, what accounts for the differences in multiple accounts of the same story recorded in the Qur'an? For example, four different Surahs contain the story of Lot in Sodom. Each recounting of the story is different from the others even when quoting what Lot said to the Sodomites. Thus we have Muslims pointing to differences in accounts among the Gospels but ignoring accounts of the same events throughout the Qur'an which differ in detail, order, and content.

When we find this type of variation in the Gospels, we recognize that each gospel was written by a different author with a different perspective inspired by the Holy Spirit. But if the Qur'an was preexistent in heaven and given to one man by one angel, one would not expect these types of variants. But as James White notes, "We could provide numerous examples of parallel passages all illustrating with clarity that the serious Muslim exegete must face the reality that the Qur'anic text requires exegesis and harmonization."{21}

In addition to these troubling passages recounting different versions of the same events, we also find legendary stories about the life of Jesus which do not appear in any of the known accounts from the first century. White points out, "The Qur'an fails to make any differentiation between what is clearly legendary in character and what is based on the Hebrew or the Christian Scriptures. Stories that developed centuries after the events they pretend to describe are coupled directly with historically based accounts that carry serious weight and truth content. . . . This kind of fantastic legendary material is hardly the kind of source that can be trusted, and yet the Qur'an's author shows not the slightest understanding of its nature and combines them with historical materials."{22}

In addition to the inconsistencies in retelling stories and the incorporation of legends generated centuries after the

actual events, we also should consider whether the current Qur'an is the perfectly accurate version of the earliest version supposedly shared verbally by Muhammad with certain followers. The common Islamic claims are strong and clear:

"The Qur'an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad . . . Not one letter of the Qur'an has been changed over the centuries."{23}

"It is a miracle of the Qur'an that no change has occurred in a single word, a single [letter of the] alphabet, a single punctuation mark, or a single diacritical mark in the text of the Qur'an during the last fourteen centuries."{24}

Interestingly, the hadiths give us early insight into one view of how the written Qur'an was collected and who was involved. At the time Muhammad died, there was no written version of the Qur'an. It was carried about in the minds of a set of men called the Qurra, each of whom had memorized at least a portion of the Qur'an. However, a number of these Qurra were being killed in battles, raising the prospect that a significant portion of the Qur'an might be lost. According to one hadith, Zaid bin Thabit undertook the task of collecting a written version.

"To many outside the Muslim faith, the Qur'an's organization looks tremendously haphazard and even Islamic literature notes how one surah can contain materials Muhammad gave at very different times in his life. Many Muslims assume Muhammad was behind this organization, but there is little reason to believe it. Zaid and his committee are far more likely to have been responsible."{25}

Eighteen years later the third Caliph, Uthman, charged Zaid and others with rewriting the manuscripts in perfect copies.

In the process of doing this, Zaid reportedly found at least two more passages that he had missed in his earlier compilation. Once this was accomplished, "Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt."{26}

Not every scholar agrees that this story from a hadith is accurate and many suggest a much later date after AD 705 for the compilation of the Qur'an we find today. Whether it was Uthman or some later compilation effort, since the eighth century, we have had a fairly stable text for the Qur'an with few variants. "Muslims see this as a great advantage, even an example of divine inspiration and preservation. In reality, just the opposite is the case. When a text has a major interruption in transmission, one's certainty of being able to obtain the original text becomes limited to the materials that escape the revisionist pen. For the Muslim, Uthman had to get it right, because if he was wrong, there is little hope of ever undoing his work."{27}

Al-Kindi, the Christian apologist writing around AD 820, had much to say on the formation of the Qur'an. He records that multiple versions were collated during the time of Uthman stating, "One man, then, read one version of the Qur'an, his neighbor another, and differed. One man said to his neighbor: "My text is better than yours," while his neighbor defended his own. So additions and losses came about and falsification of the text."{28} According to Al-Kindi, this situation caused Uthman to take his action while his rivals, such as Ali (Muhammad's cousin and the 4th Caliph), created and kept their own manuscripts. Al-Kindi listed alterations and changes made to the earlier documents in creating Uthman's version. One of the reasons Al-Kindi had access to this type of information was the open warfare between the Sunnis and the Shiites, led to charges and countercharges of corruption.

Al-Kindi concludes his discussion stating, “You know what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, how they hated each other and quarreled and corrupted the text; how each one tried to oppose his neighbor and to refute what he (had) said. Pray, how are we to know which is the true text, and how shall we distinguish it from the false?”{29}

As White states, “It is self-evident that no matter how stable or even primitive the Uhtmanic tradition is, it is not the only stream that can claim direct connection to Muhammad and the primitive period of Qur’anic compilation. The greatest concern for any follower of Muhammad should be what he said (or what he received from the Angel Gabriel), not what an uninspired Caliph later thought he should have said.”{30}

The study of manuscripts shows beyond all possible question that the Qur’an was neither written down in perfection in the days of Muhammad, nor was it never altered or changed in its transmission.

White concludes his study with this thought, “When we obey the command of Surah 5:4 and test Muhammad’s claims in the light of the gospel, of history, and of consistency and truthfulness, we find him, and the Qur’an to fail these tests. The Qur’an is not a further revelation of the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The author of the Qur’an did not understand the gospel, did not understand the Christian faith, and as such cannot stand in the line of Moses to Jesus to Muhammad that he claimed.”{31}

Notes

1. James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an*, Bethany House Publishers, 2013.
2. Ibid, p. 24.
3. Ibrahim, I. A., *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam*, Houston: Darussalam, 1997, p. 5.
4. White, p. 19.

5. White, p. 59.
6. White, p. 68.
7. White, p. 75.
8. White, p. 98.
9. White, p. 72.
10. *The Majestic Qur'an: An English Rendition of Its Meanings*, 4th ed.
11. White, p. 113
12. Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, www.alislam.org/library/books/jesus-in-india/ch2.html.
13. White, p. 142.
14. White, p. 158.
15. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Riyadh, Darussalam, 2003, 2:204.
16. White, p. 171.
17. White, p. 180.
18. Newman N. A., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, Hatfield PA, Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993, 498-99.
19. White, p. 186.
20. Dr. Daniel Wallace, Executive Director of CSNTM & Senior Professor of NT Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, speaking at Prairie Creek Baptist Church on August 30, 2015.
21. White, p. 229.
22. White, p. 237-8.
23. Ibrahim, p. 5.
24. Kazi, Mazhar, *130 Evident Miracles in the Qur'an*, Richmond Hill, ON, Canada, Cresecnt, 1997, p. 42-43.
25. White, p.258.
26. Sahih Al-Bukhari, 6:510.
27. White, p. 262.
28. This portion of Al-Kindi's apology is found in Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries*, 455-459.
29. Ibid.
30. White, p. 271.
31. White, p. 286.

© 2017 Probe Ministries

The Apologetics of Peter – A Logical Argument for the Deity of Christ

Steve Cable explains how the apostle Peter showed himself to be a master apologist, not the bumbling, brash fisherman he used to be.

Peter – A Leader in Apologetics

How many times have you heard the Apostle Peter portrayed as the brash fisherman whose mouth was always several steps ahead of his brain? According to many sermons, Peter's life motto may have been "Open mouth, insert foot!" Certainly Peter did not hesitate to speak his mind which sometimes landed him in trouble and sometimes resulted in commendation (Matthew 16:23; Matthew 16:17). I suspect we often focus on Peter's foibles because we feel that if Jesus could love and use Peter then perhaps there is hope for us as well. Others have been known to say, "I guess I take after Peter" as an excuse for thoughtless words or actions which dishonor Christ.



However, if we look at Peter's entire life journey as recorded in Scripture, we see a life that set an incredible example of love, zeal, compassion, courage and *effective apologetics*. Wait a minute! Peter, a leader in apologetics?

That field is only for egghead theologians, not an uneducated fisherman like Peter, right?

Yes, absolutely Peter was a leader in this area. Here are several reasons why we can be sure that Peter was a leading apologist for Christianity.

1. Peter recognized the evidence pointing to Jesus as the Christ early on. When others doubted Jesus' teaching, Peter declared, "To whom shall we go, you (Jesus) have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). As an eyewitness of Jesus' teaching, signs and miracles, Peter, through the Father's revelation of His Son, went on to declare, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 6:16).

2. Beginning at Pentecost, Peter took on the role as the primary spokesperson presenting a reasoned argument for the gospel before the Jewish masses, the Jewish authorities and the first Gentile converts.

3. It appears that Peter was the one Paul approached to discuss his theology and arguments for the gospel before Paul began sharing them with the entire Roman world (Galatians 1:18). In his second epistle, Peter equates the letters of Paul with the "rest of Scripture," giving them his approval as "God breathed" (2 Peter 3:15-16; 1:20-21).

4. Peter is the one that commanded us to be prepared to give an effective, reasoned argument for our faith, introducing the term "apologetics" to our vocabulary as important for every believer as he told the believers in Asia, "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 Peter 3:15-16).

Peter was never shy about taking the lead. If we are to obey this command to be prepared with a reasoned defense, it behooves us to look at the example and teaching of Peter.

In this article, we will examine the apologetics of Peter to help us grow in our ability to give a reasoned defense. Peter was following the example and instruction of his Teacher, Jesus.{1} (For a detailed discussion on Jesus' example, check out "The Apologetics of Jesus" probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus and other resources at probe.org.)

Peter's Defense – Credible Witnesses for the Gospel

Peter commands each of us to be prepared to give an effective reasoned argument for our hope in Christ. Is it possible that this uneducated fisherman was a master at this craft? Let's begin our examination of how Peter went about making an argument for the gospel.

I have been greatly blessed by studying Peter's sermons and testimony in Acts and his letters to the churches in Asia. From that study, we find that Peter focused on five aspects in his comprehensive defense of the gospel:

1. Credible witnesses
2. Compelling evidence
3. Confronting objections with consistent reasoning
4. Changed lives
5. Clear conclusion

Let's look at each of these aspects in turn to see what we can learn to make us better at giving a reasonable explanation for our faith in Christ.

First, Peter based his argument on the basis of credible witnesses. He pointed his audience to four primary witnesses:

1. The eyewitnesses to Jesus' life
2. The audience's own personal knowledge of Jesus
3. The testimony of Scripture
4. The Holy Spirit

Peter and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. Speaking to a crowd in the temple shortly after Pentecost, he said, "[Jesus' resurrection is] a fact to which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). In Caesarea, he told the Gentile Cornelius, "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Acts 10:34-48). Much later, writing to the believers in Asia, Peter explains, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-17). Multiple eyewitness accounts of an event provide credibility, so Peter points to "we," not just "me," in each occasion.

Peter also called upon the experience of his listeners. In his sermon at Pentecost, he points to the signs Jesus did stating, "just as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). In other words, your own experience supports what I am telling you about Jesus.

Peter uses the Scriptures as an important expert witness. In Acts, Peter refers to the witness of the Scriptures nine different times, explaining how the scriptural prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. He told his listeners, "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

Addressing a Jewish audience, Peter did not have to defend the credibility or accuracy of the Scriptures as you may be compelled to do today. But when he addressed the church in Asia, he wrote, "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). He pointed out that his eyewitness experience with Jesus gives him even greater confidence in the Scriptures.

Finally Peter highlighted the critical testimony of the Holy

Spirit in explaining the miracle of Pentecost and in front of the Jewish leaders. As he told those leaders, “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

At this point, you may be thinking, “I don’t have the advantages Peter had. I am not an eyewitness, the person I am sharing was not around when Jesus was performing signs and miracles, and they also think the Bible is full of myths. I am zero for three when it comes to pointing to credible witnesses.” You may be right, but the principles still apply to us today. Even though you are not an eyewitness, you possess written testimony from eyewitnesses who would not change their testimony even under the threat of death. The Gospels and the letters of Peter and John are eyewitness accounts. And, you are an eyewitness of what faith in Jesus has meant in your own life.

I have a friend who is a retired teacher and volunteer hospital chaplain. A number of years ago, his late wife was in the hospital recovering from a severe internal infection which nearly took her life. When the attending physician came by her room to arrange for her release, she thanked him for her recovery. The physician replied, “Don’t thank me. Thank God.” She responded, “How am I supposed to thank God? I don’t even believe in God.” The physician said, “To find the answer to that question, I would like to give you a prescription. When you get home, read the first three chapters of the Gospel of John.”

When she got home, she was surprised to discover that John was located in the middle of the Bible. She told her husband, “This is strange; shouldn’t I start with Genesis?” But you see, this physician had been asked to give a defense for the hope that was in him and he began by pointing her to an eyewitness. Shortly, after reading these chapters in John, she placed her faith in Christ. Her husband told me that he personally knows of at least thirty people who are now

Christians because this physician said, “Don’t thank me. Thank God,” and introduced her to the eyewitness John.

We can also point out that no one refuted Peter when he told this large crowd that they were well aware that God had performed many miraculous signs through Jesus, and the Jewish authorities did not refute it either. We can also call upon the listeners’ own experience with life. They were not around to see Jesus perform miracles, but they did have experience with the futility of sin and the struggle with hopelessness.

In our defense of the gospel, we can point out that there is universal agreement that all of these prophecies fulfilled by Jesus were written hundreds of years before Jesus’ life. The fact that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies lends credence to both the Scriptures and to Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.{2}

Peter’s Defense – Compelling Evidence for the Gospel

Of course, credible witnesses are not sufficient to make a convincing argument. If the evidence they report is circumstantial or inconclusive the argument is undermined. The testimony of Honest Abe Lincoln would not be very helpful if all he had to say was, “It was dark and I couldn’t really see what happened.” Peter made his argument by honing in on the following compelling evidence for the gospel:

1. Jesus did not live an ordinary life. God attested to Jesus’ special position “with miracles and wonders and signs.”

2. Jesus suffered a highly public death by crucifixion.

3. God raised Him up again.

First, the signs Jesus performed lend credence to the possibility of the resurrection. As Peter wrote to the Christians in Asia, “For when He received honor and glory from

God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' – and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

I have the opportunity to share the gospel with international students who have little prior knowledge about Jesus and Christianity. As we look together at the accounts of Jesus' miracles, I ask them, "What would your response be if you witnessed these events? What would you think about Jesus?" Usually the response is, "I would want to find out more about him. How is he able to do these things? He is not a normal person."

The second piece of evidence is essential to the argument. If Jesus did not actually die on the cross, His resurrection is a farce. In every defense, Peter states that we know that Jesus was put to death on a cross (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:18). Jesus' crucifixion resulted in real physical death. Jesus did not escape death; he experienced death to pay for our sins. The Jewish leaders did not try to refute Peter's assertion that Jesus had died on that cross.

The crowning piece of evidence is that "God raised Jesus from the dead" (Acts 3:15). Peter wants his audience to know that this is an indisputable fact. Peter told Cornelius and his household, "[we] ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (Acts 10:41).

Jesus' resurrection is the heart of the gospel and of any defense of the gospel. Consequently, it is the central theme of Peter's message.{3}

Peter's Defense – Confronting Objections with Consistent Reasoning

Some Christian speakers suggest that being "fools for Christ"

(1 Corinthians 4:10) means that we do not need to address objections with logical arguments. This is odd since the person they are quoting, Paul, based his ministry and his letters on giving a rational argument for the Christian faith. Perhaps even more compelling is that the uneducated fisherman, Peter, also confronted objections using logical reasoning. He knew that a good argument addresses both the evidence clearly supporting the conclusion and also any evidence which appears to counter the conclusion.

Let's look at three specific objections on the minds of his listeners that Peter addressed in Acts and his letters.

The first objection he addressed is the popular notion that the Messiah would come in triumph and in power; certainly not in suffering and death. In his arguments, Peter reminds the listeners that the prophets clearly state that the one who will bring healing and restoration will suffer (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:11; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; 2:21-24). He told the crowd in the temple, "God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer" (Acts 3:18). He pointed the rulers and the elders to Psalm 118 when he declared, "[Jesus is] the stone which was rejected by you the builders, but which became the chief corner stone" (Acts 4:11).

The second objection is that the Scriptures do not teach the resurrection of the dead. The Jews were looking for a descendant of David who would reign forever as the Messiah. Peter used Psalms written by David to show that the God had revealed that the Messiah would die but not be abandoned to Hades or suffer decay and be raised to sit at the right hand of God (Psalm 16:8-11; 132:11; 110:1).

Later in his life, Peter took on a new objection which was not an issue in his early defense. This third objection was that Jesus had not returned to the earth as He promised. Peter knew that some scoffers were saying, "Why should we believe that

Jesus is going to return? It has been years since His death and the world just keeps going along just as it always has." Peter responds by

1. identifying the false assumption in the scoffers' argument,
2. providing an important perspective on the question, and
3. explaining the rationale for delaying Jesus' return.

The false assumption is that God has not dramatically intervened in the past. Peter reminds them that God destroyed human civilization through the flood and the scoffers of that time did not believe God would act against them either.

The important perspective is that God does not view time in the way humans do. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The rationale is God's mercy as Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Although you may need to address one of these three specific topics at sometime, the important point is that Peter did not gloss over the objections. He did not just say, "I am an eyewitness. Jesus is the resurrected Messiah. Repent and believe." He addressed the concerns he knew were on the minds of his audience with consistent rational arguments.

Peter's Defense – The Testimony of Changed Lives

Peter knew that an effective argument for the gospel, for our hope, needs to include visible as well as oral arguments. Peter emphasized current evidence that his audience could experience or observe at that time.

For example, at Pentecost his sermon is in response to the crowd drawn to the spectacle of the disciples praising God in many different languages. He points out that this event is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel. Then the body of his message leads to the point that "[Jesus] has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

Similarly, in the temple he points to the healing of the lame man as evidence that Jesus is the resurrected Prince of Life (Acts 3:15-16).

In his first letter to the churches in Asia, Peter explains that our purpose as God's special people is to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). One way we fulfill our purpose is by always being ready to give a reasoned argument for our faith. However, Peter teaches us that it is much more than a verbal or written argument. According to the body his letter, we proclaim Jesus' excellencies by

1. our excellent behavior,
2. our loving relationships,
3. our response to suffering,
4. our servant's heart, and
5. our devotion to prayer.

These living arguments are essential elements supporting any effective argument explaining our living hope in Jesus. Peter put it this way: "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 (1 Peter 3:15-16). A good conscience and good behavior are directly tied to the effectiveness of our defense. Peter also highlights the importance of presenting our argument with gentleness and a genuine concern and respect for the other person as someone created in the image of God and loved by

Jesus.

Peter's Defense – A Clear Conclusion

Sometimes we get so enthused about the argument that we forget the purpose. We always want to point people to the fact that they can receive a living hope through faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Peter always kept his conclusion in mind. Let's look at how he presented the conclusion.

To the crowd at Pentecost, he said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified. . . Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:36-39).

To the crowd in the temple, he said, "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19).

To the Jewish leaders, he proclaimed, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

To Cornelius and his household, he concluded, "through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

To the church in Asia, he reminded, "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" (1 Peter 1:3).

Peter wanted them to understand the importance of Jesus life, death, and resurrection to their eternal future. His clear conclusions invited a response from each individual.

Our examination of the preaching and teaching of Peter has

shown him to be a master apologist for the gospel. If we want to follow in his footsteps, we study his example preparing ourselves to give an effective argument consisting of

1. credible witnesses
2. compelling evidence
3. confronting objections with consistent reasoning
4. changed lives, and a
5. clear conclusion.

Then when people say that you are acting like Peter, it should be a testimony to your effective witness for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion on Jesus' example, check out Pat Zukeran's "The Apologetics of Jesus," probe.org/apologetics-of-jesus) and other resources at probe.org.
2. For more resources explaining our confidence in the Bible as a reliable witness, check out Pat Zukeran's "Authority of the Bible" (probe.org/authority-of-the-bible) and other resources by going to probe.org/radio.
3. To find out more information on the compelling evidence for the Resurrection and its importance in making a reasoned argument for the gospel, see Steve Cable's, "The Answer is the Resurrection" (probe.org/answer-is-the-resurrection) and other resources available at probe.org/radio.

© 2010 Probe Ministries International

Probe Survey 2020 Report 6:

Nothing in Particulars and Biblical Views

Steve Cable analyzes Probe's 2020 Survey, examining beliefs of 'Nothing in Particulars' on salvation, biblical worldview, and sexual issues.

We want to examine the Unaffiliated and particularly those who selected Nothing in Particular (NIP) as their religious preference. As noted in the first article of this series{1}, some researchers earlier in this century posited that many of the Nothing in Particulars were actually part of the Christian majority in America and would return to the fold as they aged. However, as shown in that article, this idea has not materialized as the young adults aged. Rather, the percentage of NIPs in each age group has grown as the age group has aged.

In this report, we will see how very different the beliefs of the NIPs are from those taught in the New Testament. We will look at this in three separate areas:

1. Salvation through Christ Alone.
2. A Biblical Worldview
3. Attitudes Concerning Sexual Issues

In these three areas, we will discover that most NIPs disagree with biblical teaching on these topics.

Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

One question asked was "What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?" Particularly for the Unaffiliated, we want to know whether it is a lack of knowledge or some other reason. When asked this question, the respondents could select from the following answers:

1. Never gave the question any thought.
2. Don't believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
3. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
4. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
5. There is no personal, creator God.
6. Another answer not listed here.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

Figure 1 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39

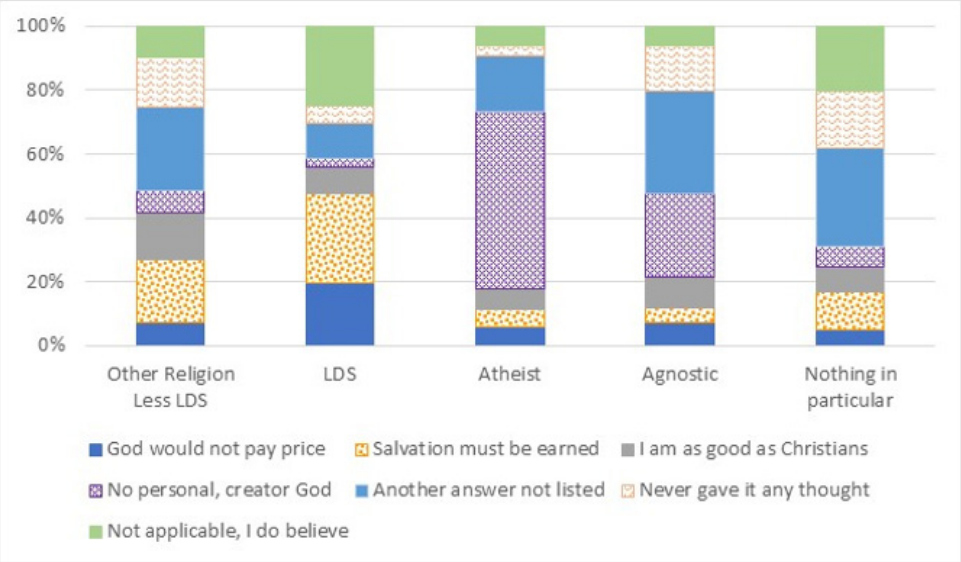


First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in Report #4. But in the current discussion, we want to focus on Other Religion and Unaffiliated. Respondents from Other Religions were most likely to select either "salvation must be earned" or "another answer not listed." A smaller percentage, just over 10%, selected "I am clearly as good as Christians I know. That answer appeared to be irrelevant to them.

On the other hand, the two largest segments selected by the Unaffiliated were "no personal, creator God" and "another answer not listed." Both groups had about 15% of their number select "Not applicable, I do believe."

To get a better understanding of what drives these results, we dove further into the makeup of each of these two groups. The results are shown in Figure 2.{2} We divided Other Religions into the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and all other non-Christian religions. We divided the Unaffiliated into Atheist, Agnostic and Nothing in Particular. As shown, the LDS respondents are much more likely than other religions to select "salvation must be earned," "I do believe," and "God would not pay the price." Almost one quarter of the LDS selected "I do believe" which explains how the Other Religion category showed about 15% with that answer. So we see that a strong majority of LDS people believe that they must do something more than believing in Christ to achieve salvation. At the same time, a significant minority believe in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

Figure 2 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39



The Atheist subgroup follows our expectations. A majority (> 55%) don't believe in Jesus as savior because they do not believe in any God at all. When we add in "another answer not given," about three quarters of the Atheists are covered.

Moving to Agnostics, we see that a strong majority selected either "no God" or "another answer not given." Adding in "I never gave it any thought," we cover about three quarters of the Agnostics.

The Nothing in Particular group (NIPs) has a significantly

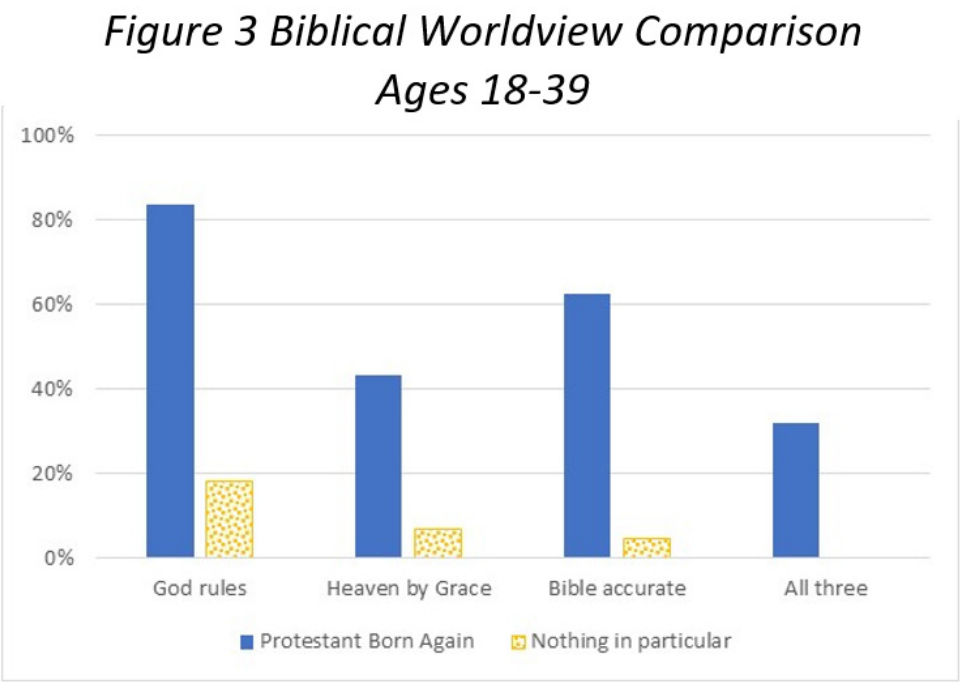
different range of answers. About one in five say they do believe in salvation through faith in Christ. This number is significantly higher than Atheist and Agnostics, but it still leaves four out of five who say they do not believe. Almost one half of them selected “another answer not given” or “I never gave it any thought.”

So, there are about one fifth of the NIPs who might have a somewhat Christian view of salvation. However, less than 3% of this group claim to be born-again. And of course, four fifths of this group say they do not belih3eve in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So, an overwhelming majority of the NIPs clearly are not born-again or evangelical Christians.

NIPS and a Subset of a Biblical Worldview

How do those who claim their religion is “Nothing in particular” stand in accepting a subset of the Basic Biblical Worldview discussed in earlier articles? The subset consists of the following three questions:

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today**{3}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings: **Strongly Agree**
3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**



Let's compare the results for Born-again Protestants and those who claimed to be Nothing in Particular. As shown in Figure 3, for each of the questions those agreeing with a biblical worldview among the Nothing in Particulars is a small fraction of those among Born-again Protestants. When we combine the three questions together, we see one out of three Born-again Protestants vs. no NIPs. Certainly, some of these NIPs came from an evangelical background, but none of them interviewed in our survey ascribe to a basic evangelical worldview as adults. As noted in our first report, one in three orn-again Protestants is a disappointing percentage ascribing to these biblical worldview questions, but it is certainly dramatically better than the Nothing in Particular group.

NIPs and Biblical Sexual Morality

On another front, we compare views on biblical sexual morality held by Born-again Protestants and Nothing in Particulars. To do this, we will consider three of the questions from our survey as listed below.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly
2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:

- **a. To be avoided**
- b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
- c. A matter of personal choice
- d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
- e. Don't know

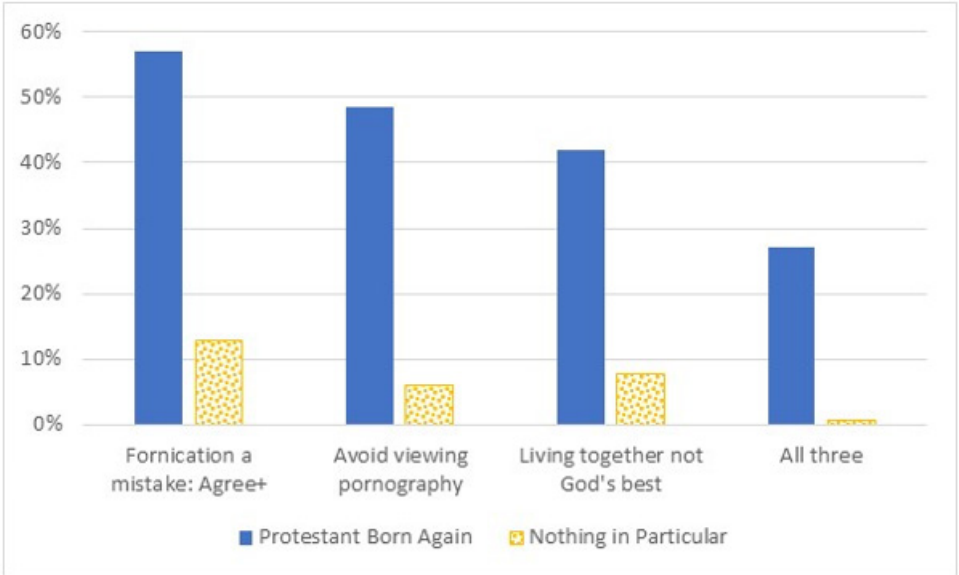
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
    - a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
    - b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
    - c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
    - **d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.**

For this comparison, we are looking for the following answers:

1. Either Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat
2. To be avoided
3. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

The results from our survey are shown in Figure 4. Once again, we see a large difference between these two groups. Clearly, the NIPs do not ascribe to a biblical view

Figure 4 Comparison of Sexual Morality
Ages 18 - 39



on sexual morality. The majority of Born-again Protestants do not ascribe to those beliefs either, but a significant minority of them do.

Summary

As discussed above, we find that the Nothing in Particular group have

- less than one in five who say they are trusting in Christ for their salvation,
- none who accept a simple three question take on a biblical worldview and
- almost none who accept a biblical view on sexuality.

In each of the age groups considered in our surveys, the percentage of respondents selecting a NIP affiliation has grown as the age groups have grown older. There is no indication that any significant number of them are returning to or turning to an Evangelical Christian perspective.

Clearly for the upcoming decade a critical question for the Evangelical church is, How do we reach the Unaffiliated and especially the Nones with the good news of the gospel? Since the vast majority of NIPs do not accept the authority of the Bible, we need to b e prepared to share with them why we can believe the Bible is an accurate communication from the Creator of this universe. In particular, that the biblical account of the death resurrection of Jesus is an accurate historical account. One source to use in this task is our article "The Answer is the Resurrection"{4} which can be found on the Probe website.

Notes

1. Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020
2. As we dive down into these subgroups remember that the smaller number of respondents of each type reduce the accuracy

as we apply our limited sample to the entire group across the United States. In this case, we surveyed 68 LDS, 178 Other Religions not LDS, 124 Atheist, 167 Agnostic, and 245 Nothing in particular (between 18 and 39 years old).
3. 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; and don't know.
4. The Answer Is the Resurrection: Sharing Your Faith in Christ (probe.org)

© 2022 Probe Ministries

Seeing Through News Media Bias: Exposing Deception and Proclaiming Truth in an Age of Misinformation

Steve Cable examines the role of deception in how we receive much of today's information, providing perspective on how to see through it to the truth.

Biblical Perspective on Truth

We live in an age when many of us feel as if we are swimming in a sea of information. From broadcast media to cell phones to ubiquitous internet access, we are assailed with more information than we can possibly assimilate. Just on the internet alone we are asked to deal with social networking,

blogs, news feeds, forwarded emails, spam, not to mention our compulsion to Google any topic that crosses our mind.



Most of the information we encounter is intended to impact our view of truth; what we think about politics, economics, relationships, needs, and wants. Its purpose is to reshape your current view of reality into a different view that someone else is promoting. This reshaping may be good or bad depending upon the validity and implications of the revised view.

One response to this deluge of information is to despair of ever discerning truth. After all, what standard can I use to compare competing truth claims? If one medical doctor promotes eating fish daily and another doctor says it is dangerous due to high mercury levels, how can I discern the truth? I may be tempted to retreat into a postmodern perspective, creating my own personal, relative truth that works for me while affirming that others may need to create a different truth that works better for them.

However, as a Christian, I know that there is absolute truth. I may not have full awareness of truth, but it does exist regardless of my lack of knowledge or understanding. Absolute truth is reality as seen from God’s perspective, lived out through the person of Jesus Christ and recorded for us in the Holy Bible. When I consult that Bible, I find that I am not to be tossed about by all of this competing information, but rather I am to be grounded in the truth and to speak the truth in love. If I am responsible for speaking truth then God must have equipped me to discern truth from falsehood.

In this article, we will begin by looking at a biblical perspective of truth and the battle between truth and deceit. Then we will look at some of the ways misinformation is being foisted upon us today and explore some biblical principals to expose it.

Truth Is Central to the Gospel

Some people suggest that truth is of secondary importance in the work of Christ. According to this view, we should focus on grace and relationship rather than doctrine and not be concerned if people profess faith in a perception of Jesus that is not consistent with the biblical record. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that grace and truth are both indispensable parts of the gospel. Let's consider three passages from Scripture:

- Paul tells us that "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of *the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4).
- Jesus explains to Pilate, "For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world, to testify to *the truth*" (John 18:37).
- In his gospel, John proclaims, "The law was given through Moses, grace and *truth* were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

From these passages we see that:

- Knowing the truth is what God desires for people.
- Proclaiming the truth is central to the purpose of Jesus' incarnation.
- Jesus is the source of both grace and truth.

When we receive Jesus we are not only accepting God's grace for us, but also enthroning Jesus as our source for truth.

Challenge of Deception

We are called to walk in the truth and to speak the truth, but we find this to be a challenge. One consistent theme of the Bible is that the war between good and evil is a conflict

between truth and deception. As we strive to walk in the truth, we will find ourselves assailed with deception, misinformation and partial truths. If we look at our world objectively, we will see that deception is at the heart of most problems. The Bible gives us insight into three reasons why exposing deception is at the heart of our Christian walk.

First, deception is at the heart of Satan's plan to destroy us. Jesus tells us that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there *is no truth* in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a *liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44-45). Satan began by deceiving Eve in the garden and his campaign of deception remains the centerpiece of his strategy to attack God

Second, deception is at the heart of man's separation from God. As Paul explained in Romans, "For they exchanged *the truth of God for a lie*, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). When we accept Satan's lies, we begin a life of self deception buying the illusion that we can truly live apart from our Creator.

Third, deception is at the heart of man's efforts to exploit you. Peter warns us "because of false teachers the way of *the truth* will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with *false words*" (2 Peter 2:2-3). By convincing us to buy into a "false truth", exploiters can manipulate us into doing what they want us to do rather than what God has called us to do.

Through Jesus Christ, God has redeemed us from slavery to deception, and there will be no deception in heaven. While we live on this earth, God knows we are going to have to deal with deception everyday. He commands us to be on our guard so that we can walk in the truth. In Ephesians, we are told that

> We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by

> waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the *trickery of men*, by craftiness in *deceitful scheming*; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14-15).

The importance of being on our guard is also emphasized in Colossians where Paul writes,

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and *empty deception*, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

God gives us this warning because many Christians live with their minds captive to a world system based on empty deception. Although these believers have an eternal inheritance, they are largely ineffective in bearing fruit for Christ. We are commanded to take positive action to see that this does not happen to us and to tear down the walls of deception that hold others captive.

News Media As a Source of Misinformation

Clearly, the Bible teaches us that Satan and the world system are out to take us captive and make us ineffective in our Christian lives by deceiving us into conforming to a perverted view of truth. Every successful con begins with an attempt to validate the trustworthiness of the conman. A recent example is the complex investment Ponzi scheme run by Bernard Madoff which has purportedly cost investors $50 billion. His impeccable credentials and complex models convinced not only friends, but also large hedge funds to trust him with their money. This aura of trustworthiness allowed his scheme to continue for years even though a Boston analyst had been reporting him to the SEC consistently for the last nine years.

The most dangerous sources of information are those that occupy positions of trust. Consequently, it should come as no

surprise that the mechanisms we turn to for factual information or truth are oftentimes the biggest sources of misinformation. In our society, we look to the news media, academia, government and the arts to provide information and perspective to understand reality or truth. As Christians, we need to approach these sources of information with a degree of caution to avoid being taken captive by a distorted worldview.

In what follows we will focus on how to approach information we receive from the news media (newspapers, magazines, television, internet news, and blogs). As recognized by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights, we need the press to be free to provide news and commentary as they see them without fear of retribution. However, the press can also wield a dangerous amount of power when left unbalanced. As Mark Twain quipped, "There are laws to protect the freedom of the press's speech, but none that are worth anything to protect the people from the press."

First let's consider the question, Is the information we receive really biased toward deception? In America, multiple polls have found that the vast majority of the members of the press are secular and liberal. But some argue that their personal views should not keep them from presenting information in an unbiased manner. However, multiple academic studies of this question have shown that news reports are biased. For example, an analysis of news reports done by researchers from UCLA and the University of Missouri concluded:

> Our results show a strong liberal bias: all of the news outlets we examine, except *Fox News' Special Report* and the *Washington Times* received scores to the left of the average member of Congress. . . . *CBS Evening News* and the *New York Times* received scores far to the left of center.{1}

Many reporters are trying to provide objective reports, but it is very hard for any of us to completely set aside our biases

and agendas. What we consider balanced is in fact skewed by our own views and thus off center from true objectivity.

The deceptive nature of news reporting is not new. Writing about the period around the First World War, C. S. Lewis stated,

> Even in peacetime, I think those are very wrong who say that school-boys should be encouraged to read newspapers. Nearly all that a boy reads there in his teens will be known before he is twenty to have been false in emphasis and interpretation, if not in fact as well, and most of it will have lost all importance. Most of what he remembers he will therefore have to unlearn.{2}

Part of the reason for biased reporting is the view held by most people in the news media that their calling is to shape society into a better place, not just provide people with the facts. Therefore, news reports are not simply unbiased facts but rather a product created by newspeople to impact society. As Terry Eastland observed in his study on the collapse of mainstream media,

> The most influential journalists understood that news is rarely news in the sense of being undisputed facts about people or policy, but news in the sense that it's a product made by reporters, editors, and producers. . . those who define and present the news have a certain power, since news can set a public agenda. And they weren't shy about exercising this power.{3}

Bias in news reporting shows up in subtle (and not so subtle) ways. Four of those ways are:

1. Setting the agenda
2. Slanting the information
3. Skewing the facts
4. Skewering the truth

By “setting the agenda” we mean that people within the news establishment determine what information makes it into print and onto television newscasts. An event that highlights a favorite cause of the journalist or news organization may receive extensive media coverage while another receives little or no coverage. One area we see this occurring in is so-called hate crimes where coverage may vary greatly depending upon the “disadvantaged group” represented by the victim. This method is the hardest to detect since it is based on the absence of information. However, the recent growth of alternative news sources makes detecting this method of bias easier.

“Slanting the information” uses subtle techniques to influence that way people interpret the information included in a news story. Examples of this are the selection of headlines, the type of words used to describe the topic, the selection of experts, and how the experts are described. Warning signs of this technique include words that seem to overstate the case or emphasize a point which is secondary to the facts. One example of this was an August 2006 *Washington Post* article on economic reports showing record growth and outstanding performance of the economy. One might expect a headline stating something like “Economic News Encouraging in All Areas.” Instead, the actual headline stated, “Economic News Isn’t Helping Bush.”{4}

Other common techniques for slanting information include the use of labels or definitions that communicate an implied value judgment. Examples of this are using the label “anti-choice” instead of “pro-life” and defining Intelligent Design as a form of Creationism formulated to allow it to sneak into public schools.

“Skewing the facts” is a technique of selectively emphasizing the facts that support the journalist’s point of view while either discounting or leaving out facts that run counter to that point of view. It can also include drawing illogical or

unsubstantiated conclusions. Whenever you encounter a journalist using statistics to paint a conclusion as fact, you should view it with skepticism. Mark Twain reported that Disraeli was the first person to warn us that "There are lies, damn lies and statistics!"

One example of skewing the facts prominent in the recent presidential campaign dealt with the potential impact of developing more of the oil reserves of the United States. One of the candidates (and their running mate) made the following statement during multiple televised debates: "But understand, we only have three to four percent of the world's oil reserves and we use 25 percent of the world's oil, which means that we can't drill our way out of the problem."{5} What they are implying is that because twenty-five is a bigger number than four, it is obvious that our oil reserves cannot help us. Of course, most of us learned in the third grade that percentages are not absolute numbers. For example, would you rather have four percent of Bill Gates's net worth or twenty-five percent of what he spent for lunch today? In fact, comparing the size of our reserves and our yearly oil consumption, it appears that North America's known recoverable reserves would last over one hundred years if we used them to meet half of our needs. This would certainly buy us a long period of energy independence while we develop alternative sources.

More complex examples are often found in reporting on public health issues and climate change. Skewed facts are used to promote public policy around conclusions which are not really supported by the raw data. I encourage you to check out articles on our web site on condoms preventing HPV and global warming for detailed examples on how statistics can be skewed.{6}

"Skewering the truth" is the most blatant technique for biased reporting where the journalist misrepresents the information and/or presents faulty conclusions as established fact. Oftentimes the first three forms of bias may be unintentional,

but usually skewering the truth requires an overt attempt on the part of the journalist to deceive the recipient. One technique used to mask these misstatements of fact is to put them into the mouths of unidentified experts or couch them as general common knowledge among the well-informed. For example, a recent *Newsweek* article is subtitled "Opponents of gay marriage often cite Scripture. But what the Bible teaches about love argues for the other side."{7} In this article selective, liberal interpretations of scriptural passages are used to support the following conclusion: "Religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all, then, but in custom and tradition."{8} For those of us who are students of the Bible, this statement is clearly false, but it is stated as a clear fact.

In another blatant example, Michael Ennis, in his article entitled "Dissing Darwin," claims that there is a correlation between what a state's education standards say about the teaching of evolution and the performance of its students on standardized science tests.{9} However, when we examined the data he cited, we found that the actual correlation was exactly the opposite of what Ennis claimed. So, either he did not take the time to actually look at the information to see if it agreed with his claims or he hoped we would not take the time.

Uncovering Misinformation

If we are not to be taken captive by the philosophies of a godless world, it is important for us to be on the lookout for biased, agenda-driven reporting. Too many times Christians have been either unaware of the biased message or unconcerned about its impact. Looking back at the social and spiritual changes in our country over the last fifty years, we can see how this lack of awareness and concern have contributed to the emergence of dominant views on morality and religion that are counter to a biblical worldview.

The Bible instructs us to be on our guard. Let’s look as some things we should be doing to proclaim truth in a world filled with misinformation.

The first step we should take is to know what the Bible teaches and allow the Holy Spirit to use the scripture to bring discernment. As the letter to the Hebrews tell us,

> For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Second, we need to be on the alert for the warning signs of misinformation. When we recognize the need for discernment, begin by asking God for wisdom in looking for and applying the truth:

> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5-6).

Then we need to ask ourselves some tough questions about the article or news report:

1. Does it begin with truth?
2. Is it logical?
3. Does it consider all of the evidence?
4. Does the conclusion make sense apart from the argument?
5. Does it stand up to close examination?

Based on the answers to those questions, we have a pretty good idea whether we need to be concerned about being deceived. If so, the next step is to do some digging into the background to see if any of the four techniques for biased reporting have been employed. In today’s world, we can often use the internet to get access to source material that has been referenced by the journalist. However, in many cases the best way to check

up on questionable reporting is to consult a trusted resource. Organizations like Probe have often already done the research. If we don't have something on the specific article, we will probably have information on the primary topic of interest.

Once you have done your research, go back to the Bible. God has the only perspective that cannot be deceived by the schemes of the world. Compare your conclusions with Scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in truth. When the facts are not clear, you will not go wrong by being biased in favor of a biblical worldview. Remember how David delighted in God's word, saying, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Finally, share what you have uncovered with others. Don't let others you know be deceived. Follow the command to speak the truth in love. If you have done some research that other need to know, you may want to look for a venue to share it with a broader audience. One approach would be to contact us at Probe to see if it is a topic we should address on our Web site.

Remember, deception may create detours in our lives, but truth will always be truth and will win out in the end.

Notes

1. Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias," www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/groseclose/Media.Bias.8.htm.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Fontana, 1959), 128-29.
3. Terry Eastland, "The Collapse of Big Media," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2005.
4. Jonathan Weisman and Nell Henderson, "Economic News Isn't Helping Bush," *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2005, D1, accessed online at tinyurl.com/9krga.
5. NDTV.com, October 16, 2008, tinyurl.com/cfqbe8.
6. Steve Cable, Despite Media Claims, Condoms Don't Prevent

STDs," Probe Ministries, 2006, and Ray Bohlin, "The Complex Realities Behind Global Warming," Probe Ministries, 2008.
7. Lisa Miller, "Our Mutual Joy," *Newsweek*, Dec 6, 2008, accessed online at www.newsweek.com/id/172653.
8. Ibid.
9. Michael Ennis, "Dissing Darwin," *Texas Monthly*, April 2005, accessed online at www.texasmonthly.com/preview/2005-04-01/ennis.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Probe Survey 2020 Report 5: Sexual Attitudes and Religion vs. Science

Steve Cable continues his analysis of Probe's 2020 survey of American religious views moving over to consider their response to sexual mores of today and how they navigate religion and science.

The previous reports on Probe Survey 2020 were primarily focused on religious beliefs and practices. In this report, we will look at how these beliefs impact Americans as they deal with sexual issues and with navigating the relationship between religion and science. In general, the survey results confirm a continuing degradation in Americans', and particularly Born Agains', view of sex within a heterosexual marriage. We find that fewer than one in five Born Again Protestants affirm a biblical view in this area. On the other hand, Americans still tend to consider religious views at least as important as scientific positions in establishing their beliefs.

American Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

We asked four questions regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors in this survey.

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

2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:

   a. To be avoided
   b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
   c. A matter of personal choice
   d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
   e. Don’t know

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

   a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
   b. Just 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

4. People attracted to same sex relationships are:

   a. To be loved and affirmed in their sexual choices.
   b. To be avoided as much as possible.
   c. To be accepted while hoping they realize there is a better way.
   d. To be loved and told God’s truth regarding our sexual practices.

First, let’s see how the different religious affiliations impact the answers to these questions.

Sex Among Unmarried People

First, let us establish the biblical standard for sexual relations outside of marriage. Is there clear teaching on this topic? Consider Jesus' discussion in the Sermon on the Mount where He said, "You have heard that it was said, '**Do not commit adultery**.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."{1}

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul writes, "For this is God's will: that you become holy, that you keep away from sexual immorality." And then in 1 Peter 2:11, Peter writes, "I urge you to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." It is very clear that the biblical standard calls for all sexual relations to occur within a marriage between one man and one woman.

Results from the first question are plotted in Figure 1. As shown, here and in the next three graphs, we will look at those ages 18 through 29 next to those ages 40 through 55 to see if there are differences based on age. If there is a trend or variation seen in the 30 through 39 age group, then that one is also shown as seen for Born Again Protestants in Figure 1.

The graph shows the older group of Born Again Protestants is much more likely to Strongly Agree that fornication is always a mistake than the youngest group, dropping from almost one half to a little over one quarter, 46% to 29%. **Over two thirds of Younger Born Again Protestants have adopted the common view of the culture** that sex and marriage are not necessarily related. Note that even among the older group, **less than half of them strongly agree that sex outside of marriage is always a mistake**.

Looking across other religious affiliations, we see that the vast majority said they Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with

this statement{2}. They generally believe that sex outside of marriage by unmarried people is not an issue. This is particularly true of the Unaffiliated with close to 90% (nine out of ten) disagreeing.

How have these views changed among born again young adult individuals over the last decade? Looking at the GSS survey from 2008, we find that over one in three (37%) Born Again Christians ages 18 through 29 agree with the statement, "If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, I think it is always wrong." Now in 2020, we find that over one quarter (27%) of Born Again Christians agree that it is always wrong. Although the questions asked were not identical, they are close enough to indicate that the drop of ten percentage points is a significant decline in young adult, Born Again Christians who take a biblical position on sexual activity outside of marriage.

Pornography.

The second question deals with views on the acceptability of viewing pornographic material. What does the Bible tell us about feeding our minds with sexually immoral material? Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil ideas, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." We are warned in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee sexual immorality! Every sin a person commits is outside of the body but the immoral person sins against his own body." And further in Ephesians 5:3, "But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints." Clearly, avoiding sexual immorality in all forms includes avoiding explicit sexual material.

The results are shown in Figure 2. Once again, we see that Born Again Protestants are much more likely to say that we should avoid exposure to such material. Both the younger group and the older have more than 50% who say it is "to be avoided." However, the data also shows over four out of ten

Born Again Protestants believe it is usually okay. Given what we know about the negative effects of pornography on healthy living and relationships, this result is surprising.

All the other religious affiliations have only a small percentage of people who think that explicit sexual material should be avoided. Only about one in five Other Protestants and Catholics affirm that pornography is to be avoided. Once again, the Unaffiliated lag those affiliated with some religion having only about one in twenty (5%) that think pornography should be avoided.

For those who are not Born Again Protestants, around 10% to 20% say that such material is okay if no one is hurt in them. These people fail to realize that the person being hurt by these materials is themselves and their loved ones. More surprisingly, the vast majority of these people selected "a matter of personal choice" or "not a problem if you enjoy it," implying that if people are shown being harmed in this pornographic material, that is perfectly okay if you enjoy it or want to put up with it.

Living Together Before Marriage

What does the Bible tell us about living in a sexual relationship before marriage? In Colossians 3:5, Paul states, "So put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry." The current philosophy of "try before you buy" is popular but totally contrary to biblical instruction for a rich, fulfilling life. This philosophy clearly "belongs to the earth."

The third question examines views on whether it is a good thing to live together in a sexual relationship before committing to marriage. The results are summarized in Figure 3. This is another question where Born Again Protestants show a significant difference based on age. The older group, 40

through 55, shows almost 60% who say that it should be avoided as instructed by God. The younger group, 18 through 29, shows only 40% with the same viewpoint. Across all age ranges only about one half of Born Again Protestants say that this practice should be avoided. So, even among this group, over half believe that it is okay and might be helpful.

Once again, this question reveals a stark difference between Born Again Protestants and all other religious affiliations. Other Christian groups show **much fewer** than one in five adherents who believe this practice should be avoided. And we see the Unaffiliated lead the other viewpoint, with about nine out of ten of them saying the practice "might be helpful" or "makes sense in today's culture."

Same Sex Relationships.

The fourth question deals with how people react toward those who profess to have a sexual attraction towards those of the same gender. What does the Bible say about same sex relationships? Let's consider the instruction from 1 Corinthians 6:9b-11, "Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolators, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

The verse above tells us two things. First, that someone who is given over to homosexual activity (like those given over to idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed) are not true followers of Christ. Even in Paul's era, many were apparently saying they would inherit the kingdom of God and so Paul begins the statement by saying "Do not be deceived." But it also clearly states that such a one can be washed, sanctified and justified in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should love them and tell them the truth that God has a better way for

their life.

Note that our question does not distinguish between those experiencing same sex attraction and those actively involved in living out their attraction through homosexual activity. Both categories of people need to be loved and told the truth.

The results for this question are summarized in Figure 4. As shown, we see some difference based on age for Born Again Protestants. However, it is not as pronounced as for the question on fornication above. Looked at as a group between age 18 and 55, less than one half of Born Again Protestants selected loving them and telling them what the Bible says about homosexual practices.

Once again, all other groups are much less likely to take a biblical position. However, when we add in the answer about "accepting them while hoping they find a better way', the other religious groups (excluding the Unaffiliated) show almost four in ten who desire them to find a better way.

Note that Other Protestants are most likely at 20% (about one out of five) to say they would try to avoid people attracted to the same gender.

Combining Questions for Born Again Protestants.

How many Born Again Protestants take a clear biblical view of all four questions concerning sexual attitudes and behaviors? Results are shown in the adjacent chart. The chart begins with results by age for the first question concerning fornication. As you move to the right, additional questions are added to the questions already addressed to the left. Thus, the bars on the right include those who took a biblical position on all four of the questions.

Clearly, ones in the older group are more likely to take a biblical view on sexual behavior. In fact, on the far right, we see that those 40 to 55 are twice as likely as those

18 to 29 to hold to a biblical view. However, more important, is that over 80% of the younger ages and over 75% of the oldest ages do not hold to a biblical view on these combined topics regarding sexual behavior.

To understand how disturbing these results should be, consider **Born Again Christians with a biblical view on sexuality as a percentage of the entire United States population. The results are 2% for 18 through 29, 3% for 30 through 39, and a whopping 6% for 40 through 55**. In other words, a slim remnant of adults in America hold to a biblical view of sexuality. A secular view promoting no relationship between sexual behavior and marriage and no limits on satisfying one's lusts currently dominates our national thinking.

Don't Do What You Say You Will Do.

We will address this topic more fully under Topic 10 but it is relevant to thinking about the Combining Question topic above. We asked this question:

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?

One of the answer choices is "Do what biblical principles teach."

Almost half (47%) of Born Again Protestant young adults (18 through 39) selected that answer. They would follow biblical principles in making moral decisions. Yet as just seen, only about 15% of Born Again Protestant young adults selected biblical principles on all four questions regarding sexual behaviors.

Although we can't be certain, it appears that many Born Again Protestant young adults either don't know what topics are covered under moral choices OR they don't know what biblical principles teach OR both. Clearly, almost half of Born Again

Protestant young adults think that they are choosing to think biblically about moral choices, but most of them are not living the way they think they are.

Responding to These Results on Sexual Attitudes

All of the results presented above show that a large majority of young adult, Born Again Protestants do not adhere to a biblical position on topics related to sexual morality. The data also shows that when Born Again Protestants enter the world of higher education and secular careers, they are surrounded by an even greater majority of people who believe that pretty much anything is acceptable in the area of sexual relations. Among other conclusions, we can be sure that these two data points tell us that while young adults were involved in church as teenagers, they were not adequately taught the basics of Christian doctrine in the area of sexuality and did not receive a good explanation as to why the Christian attitudes are much, much better than the free license rampant in our society today.

Christian teaching on sexuality must occur more frequently from the pulpit, in bible studies, in small group times. If we think that parents as the only source of information are sufficient to set up young Christians to be an example of godly sexuality, the data says “not so fast.” However, we do not equip parents to discuss these matters with their children. We cannot allow their peers to set the bar on acceptable behavior.

American Attitudes Concerning Science and Religion

We included three questions probing people’s views on the relationship between science and religion. The first question relates to any apparent conflicts between current scientific theories and their beliefs based on their religion. From the answers, one can tell whether the respondent puts more

credence in current scientific theories or in their religious beliefs. The question is:

Question #1: When apparent conflicts appear between science and religious teachings, one should:

1. Ignore science, accepting that when science learns more it will agree with your religion.

2. Examine your religious teachings to determine if the scriptures are in conflict or it is just someone's interpretation of the scriptures that conflict.

3. Change your religious views to align with current scientific views.

4. Abandon your religion as being false.

The first two answers are consistent with a Basic/Enhanced Biblical Worldview, reflecting 1) a view that their scripture is informed by a higher source of truth than simple science can draw upon, 2) a recognition that generally accepted scientific viewpoints have often changed over time, and 3) on the type of scientific questions being addressed here, there are in most cases a variety of theories supported by different groups of scientists. The second answer includes the possibility that the person's holy scriptures do not directly address the topic at hand, but that some religious leaders have inferred a position on the topic from their interpretation of scriptures.

The second two answers, i.e. 3 and 4, reflect a view that scientific teaching communicates truth that religious teachings are unable to counter. The third answer results in a religious viewpoint that will vary over time as scientific ideas gain or fall out of favor in the scientific community.

As shown in the figure, the majority of American young adults do not accept that science is infallible (by supporting answers 3 or 4). Less than 10% of Born Again Protestants selected one of these answers. And even among the Unaffiliated, less than half of them selected an answer where scientific theories trump other sources of beliefs.

At the same time, those who selected a view that ignores science all together (answer 1) were a small minority as well. Less than one in five (20%) of the Born Again Protestants and slightly over one out of ten for the other religious groups.

So well over 50% of all religious groups selected answer number 2, showing a willingness to go against science but also a desire to meld the views of science into their religious views. We did not ask a follow up question as to what they would do if they determined there was an unresolvable conflict with the current position supported by most scientists. There are not many unresolvable conflicts if one is willing to adopt a position supported by a reputable minority of scientists, e.g. intelligent design.

Question #2: My understanding of human origins is the result of:

1. Using the Bible alone with no regard for the findings of science.

2. Using science to better understand what the Bible teaches us about origins.

3. Not sure

4. Accepting a completely naturalistic view, i.e. no intelligence involved in the process.

Note these answers follow a similar pattern to those of the first question, but now they are applied to a specific question where many people assume there is no meeting ground

between science and religion.

The answers are shown in the adjacent graph. On this more specific question, the percentage of each religious group that is going to look at the Bible alone for their understanding hovers around 30% for all religious groups but plummets to under 8% for the Unaffiliated.

Conversely, only the Unaffiliated show more than three out of ten who "accept a completely naturalistic view" (choice #4). Born Again Protestants show only about one out of eight who select such a view. This result is amazing given the concerted push by some educators to force our students to accept a completely naturalistic view of creation. However it is consistent with the current state of the research on the origins of man, including new reports from 2021.{3}

The majority for each group of people selected "Not sure" or said they would use science to help them better understand what the Bible teaches.

Question #3: All real scientists believe that science is the only source of real truth.

The potential answers ranged from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree and included Neither agree or disagree.

First note that if we strictly define real scientists as individuals meeting these qualifications—1) a Ph.D. in a scientific field, 2) actively involved in the field, and 3) published in reputable scientific journals—we will find many scientists who agree that there are other sources of truth outside of science. So, we can say with confidence that **the statement in question #3 is objectively, verifiably not true**. However, there are certainly some believers in scientism [the belief that science is the only way to know ultimate truth] who claim the statement is true. They accomplish this trick by claiming that anyone who does not believe that science is the only source of real truth cannot by definition be a real

scientist.{4} In other words, they use circular reasoning.

But there is certainly a movement to instill scientism as the favored viewpoint in society.{5} How successful are these proponents of scientism? Looking at the answer shown in the adjacent chart will throw some light on this question.

We would like to see the answer: Strongly Disagree. This answer aligns with the objective truth discussed above. But what we find is that only one out of five (20%) of Born Again Protestants profess this view. Among Other Protestants and Catholics only about one out of twenty (5%) profess this view. Adding some uncertainty by adding those who say they Disagree, increases those amounts to two out of five (40%) for Born Again Protestants and one out of five (20%) for Other Protestants and Catholics.

Those who agree with the statement range from one out of four (25%) Born Again Protestants up to nearly one half (almost 50%) of Other Protestants and Catholics. Clearly, the proponents of scientism have done a good job of skewing our understanding of who scientists are and what they believe.

Combining the Questions

What do the results look like when we combine these questions? In our opinion, there are a number of different answers that could be consistent with a biblical worldview. Starting with the strictest view of relying on the Bible rather than science and then adding in those who would look at the results from science to obtain a clearer understanding of what the Bible teaches or those areas where the Bible is silent. Then, we add in their view on scientism which as already discussed is demonstrated by a long list of scientists who disagree to be false, thus being a source of strong disagreement.

The results from this comparison are shown in the adjacent figure. The first thing to notice is that the percentage of

Born Again Protestants who take a more fundamental position, i.e. science should be ignored as a source of information, is low for one question and goes down to only a few percentage points when all three questions are combined.

The right hand side of the chart considers all combinations of answers that reflect a commitment to biblical truth above current scientific theories combined with a willingness to consider what science has to offer. As shown, the combination of the first two questions has a large percent of Born Again Protestants, ranging from 55% for the youngest age group and growing to over 65% for the older age group. Since only a minority of Born Again Protestants stated Strongly Disagree that all scientists are adherents of scientism, when we add that question to the mix on the far right, we see less than one in five take a Biblical position on all three.

Effect of a Basic Biblical Worldview.

A natural question to ask is, “Does having a Basic Biblical Worldview correlate with having a biblical view on these science issues?” We can look at this question by comparing Born Again Protestants with a Basic Biblical Worldview with Born Again Protestants without a Basic BWV. The results are shown in the adjacent figure.

At a top level, we can see a correlation between a Basic Biblical Worldview and a biblical understanding of the relationship with science. This correlation appears to be strongest with those ages 18 through 29. We see that those with a Basic Biblical Worldview are about twice as likely to have a biblical view on all three of the questions related to science.

Responding to These Results on Science and Religion

As we can see from the first two science questions above, the majority of Americans do not buy into the idea that the only real source of truth is science. They don’t believe that

scientific positions automatically take precedence over their religious beliefs. Perhaps one factor supporting this stance is an understanding that scientific hypotheses and positions have changed fairly often over the years, particularly in the areas of the origin of life and the role of evolutionary processes on our current bounty of life forms. Certainly, it is not the public school system which has attempted to promote concepts which current day scientists studying the field do not support.

However, Americans do have a skewed view of scientism, with a vast majority believing that all real scientists support this religious concept. This position is a little surprising given that the view is demonstrably false.

In one area, sexual behavior, even American Christians have thrown out the teaching of the Bible. At the same time, they are resisting the call to make science the ultimate source of truth.

Notes

1. Matthew 5:27-28
2. There is also a small number of those answering Don't Know included in the number of those who do not state that they Strongly Agree or Agree Somewhat with the statement.
3. In March, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Brian Josephson declared that "intelligent design is valid science." In April, researchers writing in the journal *Current Biology* asked whether Darwin's "tree of life" should "be abandoned."
4. See for example: Daniel Dennett, Breaking the Spell, 2006.
5. See for example the book by J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 2018.

© 2021 Probe Ministries

Probe Survey Report #4: Witnessing to Your Faith and the Response

Steve Cable continues to explore Probe's 2020 survey on religious beliefs and practices, examining how people witness to their faith or not, and reasons for both sharing and for not trusting Christ.

1. How Often Do You Witness to Your Faith?

Let's consider the topic of witnessing or sharing your faith with others. In our 2020 survey we asked two questions about this topic. The first question was: *How often do you engage in intentional spiritual conversation with non-believers about your faith with a desire to see them accept it for themselves?* With this question, we wanted to avoid casual mentions of your faith and discussions with no intent at conversion. The results as shown in the chart below are surprising.

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their

current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God not beyond just their faith.

Looking at the detailed results, all religions except the Unaffiliated showed very similar results: over 20% (1 in 5) of those witnessed at least monthly and about half witnessed at least yearly. So, it would appear that there is a lot of witnessing going on with very few conversions.

Figure 1 Witness with a Desire to See Conversion

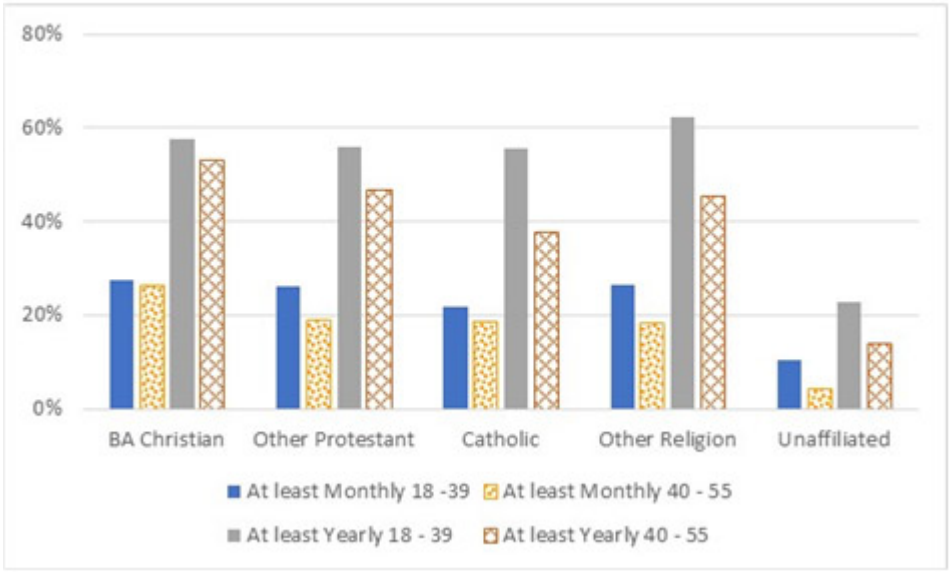


Table 1 below shows several estimates as to how many people are the recipients of these "*intentional spiritual conversations*" in a given year. The different levels shown are based on different assumptions as to how often they share with the same person and how many people they share with in a year consistent with the responses to the survey. More details are provided in the endnotes.

Table 1 Potential

Number of People Shared with by American Adults Ages 18 through 55

Religious Affiliation of Person Sharing with Intent to Convert	Potential number of individuals shared with in one year		
	Low estimate (millions){1}	Nominal estimate (millions){2}	High estimate (millions){3}
Born Again Protestant	27	56	118
Other Protestant	24	50	106
Catholic	25	51	108
Other Religion	15	31	65
Unaffiliated	12	25	52
Total	**103**	**212**	**449**

These results amazed me. If the nominal estimate was truly happening almost 60% of the population would have someone attempting to convert them every year. This topic deserves additional related questions to determine what level of sharing with the intent of conversion is actually happening in America. It may be that most people answering this question are only sharing with one or two family members such as their teenage children or a sibling. Or perhaps, many people think they would do this, but really they do not.

What makes this especially surprising is that Other Protestants and Catholics have a lot more people witnessing than they have holding a Basic Biblical Worldview or actually being involved in their religion. While only about one in ten (10%) strongly disagree with the statement that Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God, over half (50%) of them are sharing their faith with the intent to convert at least once a year. And, one in five (20%) are sharing monthly or more. If you think that there are multiple ways to heaven, why would you want to go out of your way to convert someone to your religion. Of course, you could be sharing with an Unaffiliated person who needs to choose a valid religion.

Only 4.6% of Other Protestants and 0.7% of Catholics have a Basic Biblical Worldview, but almost half of them say they intentionally witness to their faith at least yearly. When they engage in a conversation with the intent of having this other person accept their faith for themselves, WHAT IS THIS FAITH THEY ARE TRYING TO GET THE OTHER PERSON TO ACCEPT? These results do suggest that most people desire more people to think like them when it comes to religion.

In a similar vein, less than 1 in 10 (10%) Catholics and Other Protestants say they pray daily, attend church at least monthly, read the Bible weekly and say their faith is important in their daily life. So, the question remains, "What are they witnessing to???"

In contrast, only 29% of Born Again Christians have a Basic Biblical Worldview while well over half of them report intentional witnessing at least once a year. But at least BAC's have something to witness to. Those Born Again Christians with a Basic Biblical Worldview report that almost two thirds (63%) of them share their faith at least once a year. This level is only a few percentage points higher than that for Born Again Christians as a whole.

How Should We Respond?

If the number of people sharing their faith is actually consistent with the answers to this question, then we know that the percentage of people actually converting as a result of their witness is very small. Otherwise, we would have many people toggling back and forth between different professed religions.

Among Born Again Christians, we project they are sharing their faith with between 25 million and 100 million nonbelievers. However, they are sharing ineffectively with the number being shared with far exceeding the growth rate of evangelicals in America. So, pastors and parachurch organizations need to up

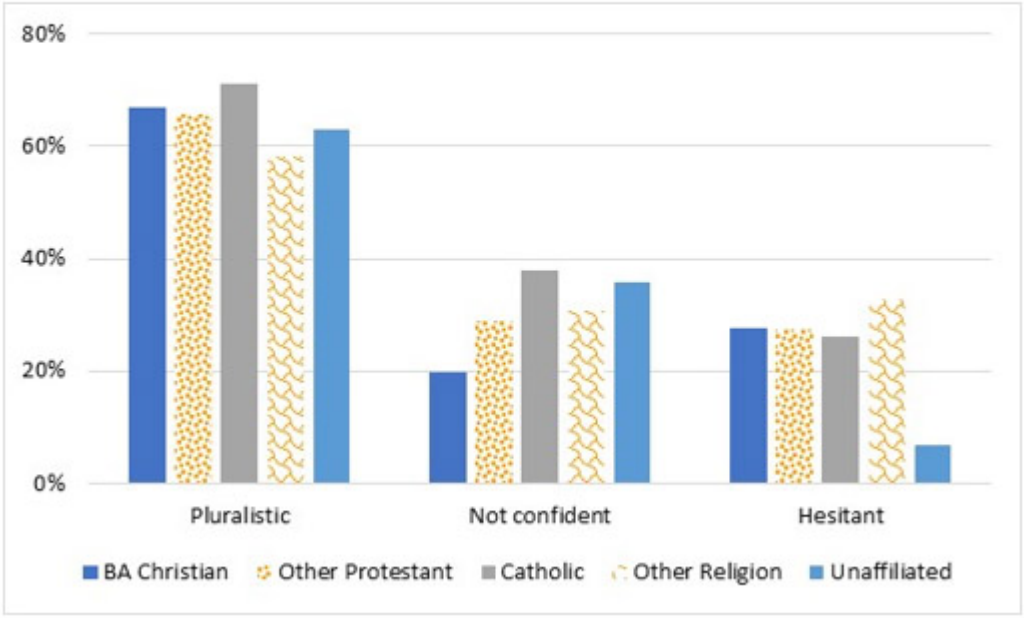
their game in training their people to share the good news of Christ. BAC's need to understand and practice the following:

1. Bathe their unsaved acquaintances in prayer asking God to bring to a clear feeling of need
2. Recognize their call to effectively share the gospel looking for opportunities to share
3. Understand how to build bridges spanning the gaps of understanding for those with different worldviews
4. Clearly explain the wonderful gift purchased for us through Jesus' death and resurrection
5. Unapologetically ask for a response to the good news shared with others
6. Realize that they should not be discouraged by a lack of interest of the lack of a positive response

2. What Keeps You From Communicating Your Religious Belief?

We also asked the question: "When I refrain from communicating my religious belief with someone, it's usually because:"{4}

Figure 2 Reason for Refraining from Witnessing Americans 18 through 39



1. They can get to heaven through their different religious belief. [Pluralism]

2. We shouldn’t impose our ideas on others. [Pluralism]
3. The Bible tells us not to judge others. [Pluralism]
4. It just doesn’t seem to be that important and I don’t want to risk alienating them. [Not confident]
5. I’m not confident enough in what I believe. [Not confident]
6. I’m waiting for a better opportunity. [Hesitant]

For the chart in Figure 2, we grouped these responses into three sets:

- **Pluralism** – There are other ways besides my way and I don’t need to impose my way on others (responses 1, 2 and 3)
- **Not confident** – Not confident that what I have to share is important to them and/or not confident that what I believe is true (responses 4 and 5)
- **Hesitant** – No rush, I can probably find a better time (response 6)

As seen in the chart, the level of respondents selecting each set of reasons for refraining are consistent across all religious beliefs. At first glance, this may seem surprising. But in a culture where pluralism is a dominant part of all religious groups, it begins to make sense. And the pluralistic reasons were dominant, attracting around two thirds of the population across all religious groupings.

For Born Again Christians, lack of confidence in what they believe is less of an issue than for other groups. And we see that the Unaffiliated are much less likely to be hesitant waiting for a better time at around 5% of all Unaffiliated. But note that most of the other groups had less than 25% say that they were hesitant.

Looking at both of the charts, we see that (even with a lot of people saying they sometimes used excuses to avoid the subject) a majority of people of any religious group (not including the unaffiliated) share with someone with a desire

to recruit them at least once a year. I would suspect that most of these people are sharing with a family member or close friend. However, we did not ask the question so that is only reasonable speculation.

How Should We Respond?

If you are a church leader or a person who desires to see Christians sharing the good news of Jesus with those who need to know, how should you respond to this data on self-identified barriers to sharing with others?

On the most common reasons (which indicate a belief that other people don't really need to know about salvation through faith in Jesus), we need to make the exclusive role of Jesus Christ in any hope of salvation a recurring and prominent theme in our teaching. This is not a topic to tiptoe gingerly around. Rather, we need to boldly proclaim, "There is salvation in no other name under heaven other than the name of Jesus Christ." God would not have planned from before the beginning of time to sacrifice himself on the cross for our salvation if there were any other means to reconcile sinful men and women to Himself. God will not force reconciliation on us. We can choose to reject His grace. But as Paul tells us in Romans, "How are they to believe in one they have not heard of?" If we think we can slough off our responsibility to tell others, we do not understand the grace of God and our role as citizens of heaven living on this earth.

For those who do not feel confident in their ability, we need to provide training and practice environments for them to learn to share their faith experience. You are telling someone about the most important element of your life; the process that brought you out of death into true life. Help prepare them and put them in a position to share the good news with a mentor alongside them.

3. Why Have You Not Believed In Salvation Through Jesus Christ?

Finally, we wanted to know why people have not accepted the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is really a question on the other side of witnessing. I am including it here, but it could easily be a separate topic.

The question asked was as follows: *What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?*

The following options were given to select from:

1. Don’t believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
2. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
3. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
4. There is no personal, creator God.
5. Another answer not listed here.
6. Never gave the question any thought.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

The table below captures the range of answers to this question.

Ages 18 – 39					
	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Other Religion	Unaffiliated
Don’t believe that God would take the penalty for my sin	4.1%	13.7%	16.3%	10.6%	5.9%
Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned	15.7%	20.1%	23.8%	22.0%	8.0%
I am clearly as good as Christians I know	11.9%	10.6%	16.2%	12.9%	8.1%

There is no personal, creator God	1.0%	2.8%	2.7%	5.8%	23.9%
Another answer not listed here	6.9%	9.9%	9.3%	21.9%	28.2%
Never gave the question any thought	15.0%	29.7%	16.3%	12.7%	13.5%
Not applicable, I do believe	45.4%	13.3%	15.5%	14.1%	12.5%

The first thing to notice in this table is that less than half of Born Again Protestants selected "Not applicable, I do believe." This result is odd since one of the questions required to be considered a Born Again Protestant is "The statement that best describes you own belief about what will happen to you after you die is '*I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.*'" Perhaps some of the Born Agains thought we wanted to know what was keeping them away before they surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is because some of them consider "confessed my sins and accepted" as something they did to earn their salvation. In that case, one could possibly consider answers 2, 5, 6 and 7 as consistent with Born Again Protestants. Although that would be somewhat of a stretch. That assumption still leaves 17% of BA Protestants whose answers are clearly inconsistent.

Other Protestants are most likely to say, "I never gave the question any thought" or "Salvation must be earned" with only 13% saying they do believe the statement about salvation through faith alone. Catholics are about the same as Other Protestants in saying they believe in salvation through faith alone. The more frequent answers for Catholics being "it must be earned", "I am clearly as good as Christians I know", and "never gave the question any thought."

The most common answer from the Unaffiliated is "another answer not listed here" followed by "there is no personal, creator God". Those who claim that most "nothing in

particulars” are really Christians find little support in that only one in five (20%) say that they do believe in salvation through faith in Jesus.

4. Christianity and Other Major World Religions

One of the things that drives our attitude toward and our approach to witnessing to our faith is how we think Christianity relates to other world religions. In part 2 of this series, we looked at some questions that dealt with believing that multiple religions could offer a workable road to an eternity with God. In this part we will look at what people believe distinguishes Christianity from other world religions if in fact anything does.

We asked our respondents the following question: “*How does Christianity relate to other major world religions?*” The respondents selected from the following choices:

1. Serves the same function with only minor differences
2. Focuses on living after the example of Jesus Christ
3. Teaches that reconciliation with God is a gift of God accessed by faith not by works
4. Promotes love for other people more deeply than other religions
5. Differs based on misconceptions about God and/or history
6. Not sure how it relates

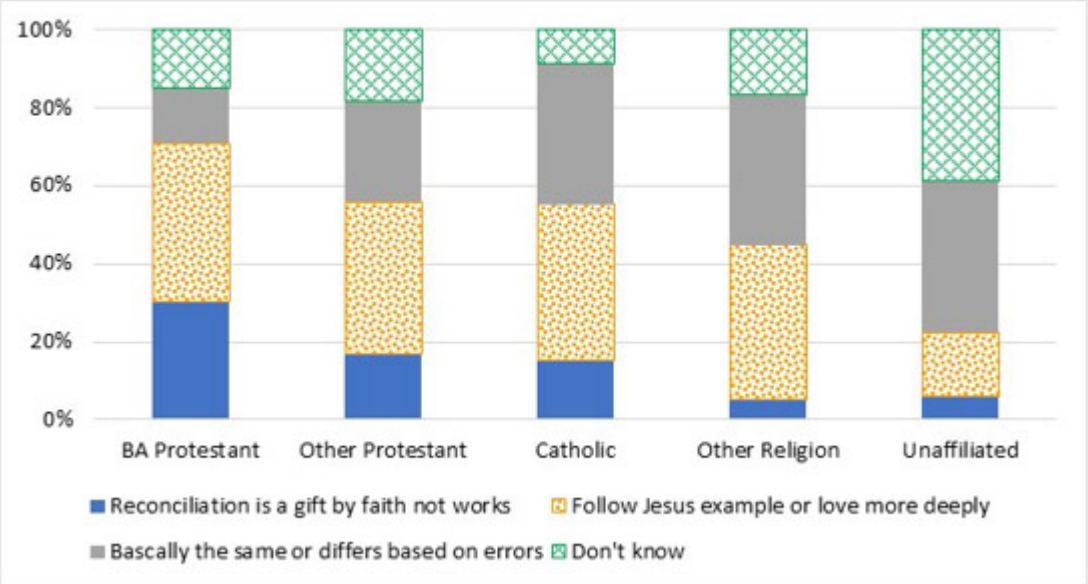
Note that answers 1, 5 and 6 indicate an ignorance about the tenets of Christianity and/or the tenets of other major world religions. As noted earlier, Christianity teaches a way to reconciliation that is very different from other world religions and is not compatible with the reconciliation stories of those other religions.

Answers two and four reflect potential differences between Christianity and other world religions. We do want to follow

Christ's example and other world religions would not teach us to do that. Other religions could not promote loving other people more deeply that Christianity does, but some of them might argue that they also promote love for others.

Teaching that reconciliation is a gift of God accessed by faith alone not through works is the greatest substantial difference between Christianity and other world religions. This teaching is significantly different than the teachings of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and others.

Figure 3 How Does Christianity Relate to Other Religions Ages 18 - 39



The results are charted in the graph to the right. First, notice the interesting result that only about 30% of Born Again Protestants selected 'reconciliation is a gift' while 40% selected following Jesus' example or love others more deeply. As noted above, this second answer is not inconsistent with the concepts of Christianity but is not as fundamental as the first. However, selecting this answer over reconciliation is a gift' is consistent with what we saw earlier: 70% of Born Again Christians are not exclusivists.{5}

Other Protestants and Catholics have less than one in five that selected 'reconciliation is a gift' and the total selecting answers 1 and 2 is slightly over one half. Thus,

almost half of them selected answers showing ignorance of or disbelief in the basic tenets of Christianity.

The results for the Unaffiliated shows their total disregard for salvation by grace and any substantial difference between Christianity and other religions.

5.Summary of Key Results

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God beyond just their faith.

We also discovered that Born Again Christians are not really more likely that other religious groups to share their faith with the purpose to convert. Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview are only marginally more likely to share with the purpose to convert at least yearly as Born Again Christians as a whole (63% vs. 57%).

Amazingly, one could project that nominally about 212 million Americans a year would be the recipients of these spiritual conversations with the intent to convert. However, if almost all of these
conversations were with the same person it might represent as few as 34 million Americans which could be primarily the children and relatives of the person sharing their faith. We

cannot know for sure without asking more questions.

Conversely, when asked what makes them refrain from sharing their faith, almost 70% of Born Again Christians selected a reason that indicated they believed that the other person did not really need to know; a universalist belief where all religious beliefs lead to heaven.

About one out of seven (14%) of adults under age 40 who **are not** Born Again Protestants believe that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This small number is true for Other Protestants, Catholics and Other Religions. This same group of religious affiliates has about 1 in 3 who belief that salvation is a result of good works and is earned or rewarded on a curving scale.

Less than one in three, Born Again Christians selected the redeeming work of God through faith as the key difference between Christianity and other religions. And less than one in five Other Protestants and Catholics selected that answer. Instead, about three out of four (75%) selected love deeply, obey Jesus or Christianity is basically the same as the message of other religions.

Notes

1. Low Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 12 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 1 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual four times.
2. Nominal Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 18 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 2 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual three times.
3. High Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 24 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly

shared on the average 4 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual two times.
4. Although most people selected only one answer, on this question they could select multiple answers
5. Exclusivists are those who believe that their religion is the only source of correct teaching concerning our relationship with God. When I get time, I will check out the relationship between those who are exclusivists and those who selected 'reconciliation is a gift'

©2021 Probe Ministries

Probe 2020 Survey Report #3: Religious Practices and Purpose for Living

Steve Cable explores Probe's 2020 survey, examining the participants' religious practices, sense of purpose for living, and views on tolerance vs. acceptance.

In our first two reports, we looked primarily at religious affiliations and core religious beliefs. In this report, we examine the level of religious activity of different religious groups and how they relate to people with different religious beliefs.

Some of the key results for Americans ages 18 through 39 on religious practices are as follows:

- Only about a fourth of Born Again Christians prayed multiple times per day and a similar number said they read their Bible daily.

- Only about one in five Born Again Christians give 10% or more of their income to their church and other charities.

- Only about one in twenty Born Again Christians reported a consistent religious life where they attended church at least **twice** a month, considered their faith as **strongly** important in their daily life, prayed **multiple times** per day, and read their Bible **daily**.

- Less than one in five Born Again Christians reported a nominal religious involvement where they attend church at least once a month, considered their faith as important in their daily life, prayed at least once a day, and read their Bible at least weekly, and gave at least 5% to their church and other charities.

- From 2010 to 2020, the percent of Born Again Christians who reported attending church at least twice a month, considered their faith as strongly important and read their Bible daily dropped by one half from 40% down to 20%.

- When asked about their ultimate purpose for living, slightly more than half of Born Again Christians selected a purpose which included serving God which was a significant drop from the two thirds who selected a similar purpose in 2010.

Some of the key results for Americans ages 18 through 39 on tolerance of other religions are:

- Only about one quarter (27%) of them disagree with the statement ". . . it is important to let people know that I affirm as true (at least for them) their religious beliefs and practices."

- At the same time, almost two thirds (65%) agree that tolerance is best defined as "Treating with respect people with ideas or actions that you believe to be wrong or misguided."

- This is another topic where we see somewhat conflicting results. Apparently, many Born Again Christian young adults think that you cannot believe someone is “wrong or misguided” when it comes to religion. Or they believe that “Treating with respect” means “affirming as true (at least for them)”.

Level of Religious Activities

We will begin by looking at two different levels of religious activity: a Nominal Level and a Committed Level as shown in Table 1 below.

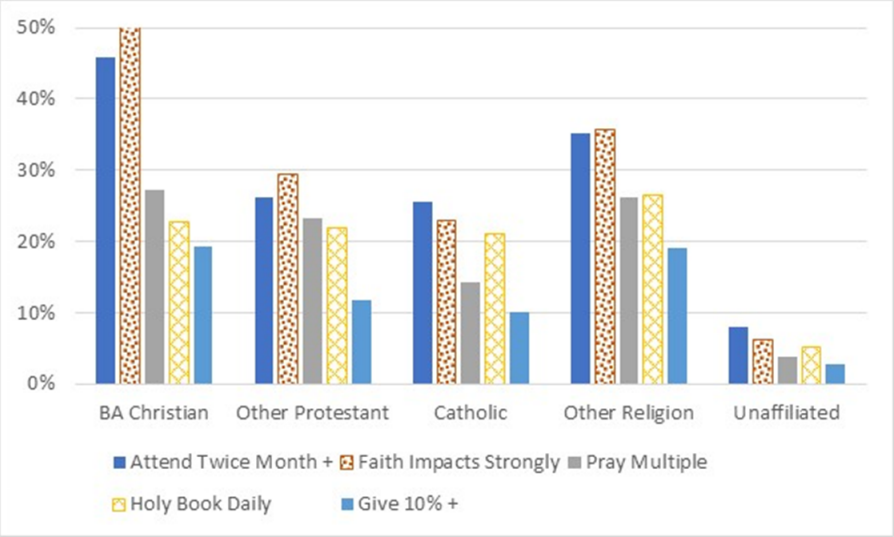
Table 1 Defining Levels of Religious Activity

Religious Activity	Nominal Level	Committed Level
How often do you attend religious services, not including special events such as a wedding or funeral?	Monthly	Twice a month or more
My religious faith has a significant impact on my daily life	Agree	Agree strongly
How often do you pray outside of a formal religious service?	Daily	Multiple per day
How often do you read or study your Holy Book in a small group setting or by yourself	Weekly	Daily or more
How much do you give to religious organizations and charities each year?	5% to 10% of income	At least 10% of income

I think most would agree that someone doing the activities listed at the level required for the Committed Level is serious about their faith. They consider it important enough to make it a priority in their thoughts, time and finances. One can find specific instructions or examples in scripture

for the importance of the first four activities listed above in the Committed Level column. Giving at least 10% of your income is not a clear direction in the New Testament, but it is a good metric for assessing someone's commitment. The nominal level probably represents someone who considers their faith as important but not important enough to involve a significant amount of time and money.

Figure 1 Committed Level of Religious Activity by Faith Group
Ages 18 through 39

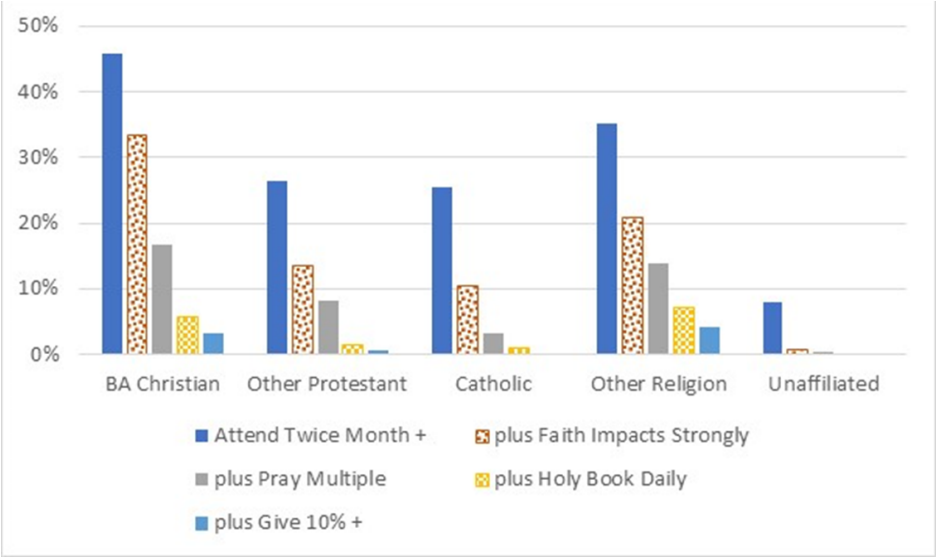


Committed Level of Religious Activity

Those ages 18 through 39 who practice their religion at a committed level are shown in Figure 1 at right. We have roughly ordered these items from highest probability of adherence to lowest.

As shown in the figure, Born Again Christians lead the way in frequent church attendance and for strongly considering their faith significant. For the next two, prayer and reading your holy book, all four of the religious groups were similar. Finally, for the giving metric, Born Again Christians show about 20% at that level of giving while Other Protestants and Catholics are about half of that level, or 10%.

Figure 2 Committed Level of Religious Activity – Cumulative
Ages 18 - 39



It is distressing that three of the five metrics show only about one in four of Born Again Christians who practice them. Even the most commonly practiced religious behaviors show fewer than half of Born Again Christians active at those levels.

And when we combine all of these metrics together (as shown in Figure 2) to identify people who show a strong commitment to their religious faith, we find around 3% (1 out of 33) Born Again Christians saying they perform all five activities. In fact, people of Other Religions have about 4% performing all five metrics. However, for all practical purposes, there is not difference between 3% and 4%. Both numbers represent a tiny portion of the faith group.

Note that if we exclude the question on giving, the percentage of Born Again Christians increases from 3% to 5%. Clearly, money is not the primary issue driving down the number of consistently active believers.

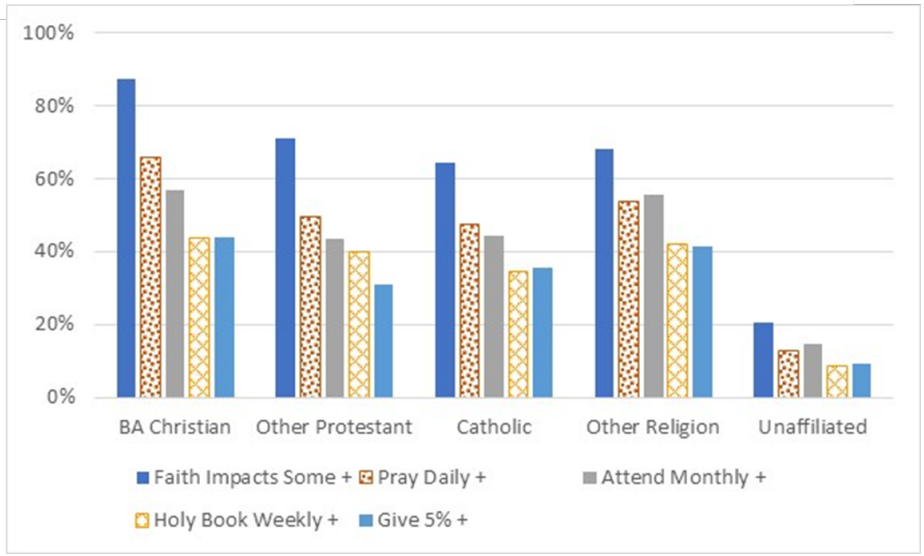
Also note that the entire Unaffiliated group reports less than 8% on each of these practices and less than 1% who claim to do even two of
these practices.

These survey results clearly show that a scant few Americans of any religious persuasion take the time to be actively involved in practices

to help them grow in their faith.

Nominal or Committed Levels of Religious Activity

Figure 3 At Least a Nominal Level of Religious Activity by Faith Group Ages 18 through 39



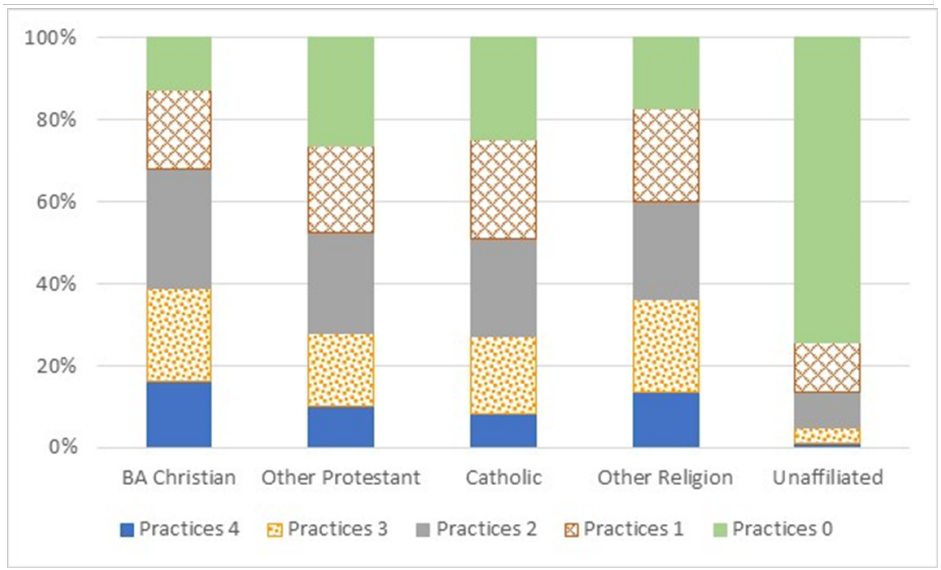
Now let's look at those with at least a Nominal level of religious practice (i.e., those who select the nominal level or the committed
level). As shown in the figure, this is a much lower bar with all religious faiths hovering over 60% on those who agree/strongly agree that their faith has a significant impact on their daily lives and around half on those who pray at least daily. The other three activities range between 30% and 50%.

We should not forget that the pastors of these religious groups should be (and probably are) ashamed of these numbers. Particularly so when we consider the percentage of each group that practices all five of these relatively easy levels of commitment. The numbers (not shown on the graph) for those who practice all five are 16% of Born Again Christians, 13% of Other Religions, 9% of Other Protestants and 7% of Catholics. I must believe that pastors of those who answered the two Born Again questions would expect those congregants to be greater than 80% rather than hovering around 15%.

It is interesting that when we combine five different metrics, each of which is greater than 40% for Born Again Christians,

that it drops down to 16%. Note both the metrics for reading the Bible at least weekly and giving at least 5% of your income to charities come in at Almost half (44%). When we combine the two metrics to see how many Born Again Christians affirm that they engage in both of these activities, the number drops to about one in four (26%).

Figure 4 Number of Nominal Religious Activities
Ages 18 through 39



So let's look and see how many said they did all the activities, three of the activities, two of the activities, etc. Almost 40% of Born Again Christians did at least three of the activities. Only 5% of the Unaffiliated could say the same. In fact, over 75% of the Unaffiliated did none of these activities.

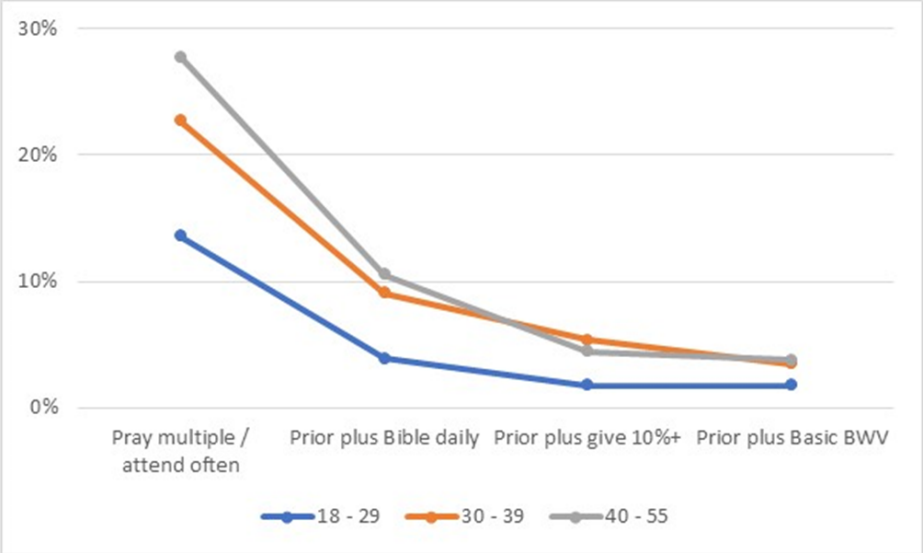
It is worth noting that Other Protestants and Catholics do not lag far behind Born Again Christians in the percentage doing at least three
of the activities. This difference is a significant contrast to the Basic Biblical Worldview questions and the "who is Jesus" questions where these other religious groups lagged far behind Born Again Christians.

If I were to say to a Born Again believer, "to consistently grow in your faith and represent the good news of Christ to the world, I recommend that you pray to God daily, attend church at least one a month, read your Bible at least one a week, and give at least 5% of your income to religious charities including your church." I would not expect to get

much blowback. After all, it takes less than one hour a week and no real financial hardship. Of course, what I really say is we should all try to live at a Committed level. Not because it is necessary for salvation, rather this level of activity will help us live a life honoring God and making a difference beyond the temporal into eternity.

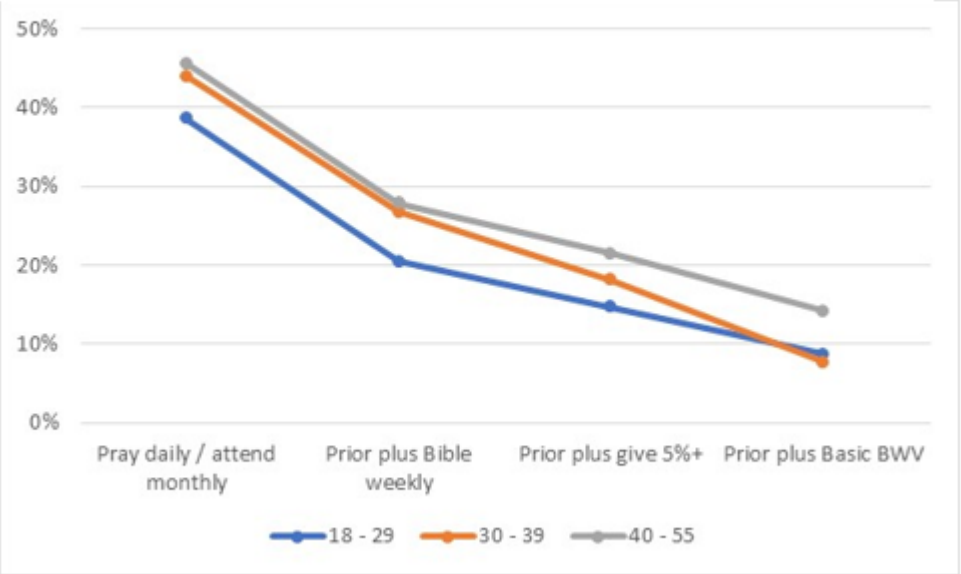
Variations by Age among Born Again Christians

Figure 5 Committed Level of Religious Activity for Born Again Christians by Age Range



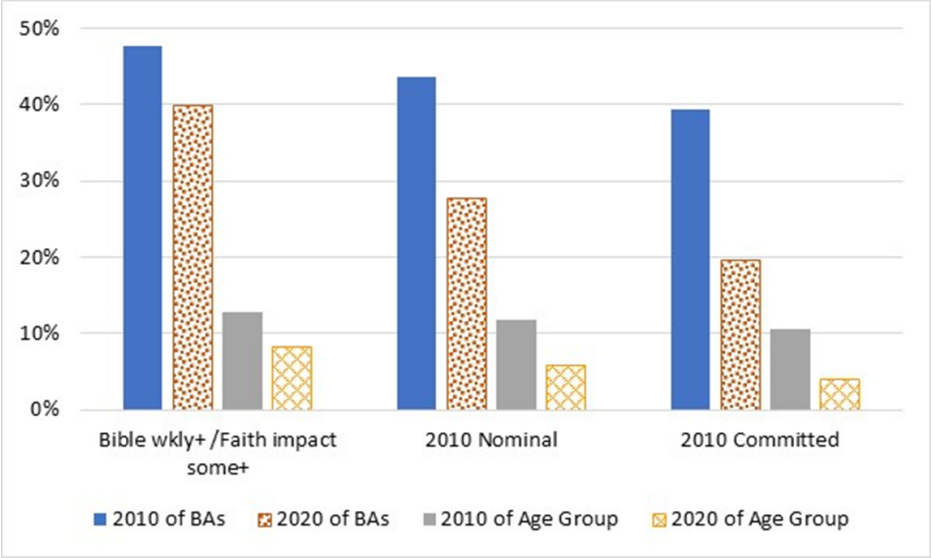
How do these religious activities vary by age among Born Again Christians? The results are plotted in the graph on the right for a
Committed Level of Activity. As shown, the percentage of the youngest adults is significantly less than for the two older groups. However, as the graph moves to the right adding more aspects to the cumulative total, the difference becomes small. In general, the youngest adults are less likely to practice key components of an active faith, but regardless of age the numbers are small.

Figure 6 At Least a Nominal Level of Religious Activity for Born Again Christians by Age Range



The results are shown on the left for a Nominal or Committed Level of Activity. We have more Born Again Christians who participate across these levels. The lines still trail down sharply as we move to the right, adding more practices to the cumulative total. The fact that only one out of five Born Again Christians ages 18 through 29 pray daily, attend church at least monthly, and read the Bible at least weekly presents a major challenge to our young adult ministries. I would suggest that these activities are essential to a consistently grow sanctification in our lives.

Figure 7 Comparison of Religious Practices in 2010 and 2020 Born Again Christians Ages 18 through 39



Religious Practice from 2010 to 2020

How has the commitment to religious practices fared over the last 10 years or so? Our survey from 2010 asked the same questions regarding attendance, Bible reading, and the importance of faith. The questions on prayer and giving were different. However, we can get some good comparison data looking at the three common questions.

In the figure at right we use two terms, 2010 Nominal and 2010 Committed, which are defined below. The 2010 Nominal attend monthly plus, read the Bible weekly plus, and agree that their faith is significant in their daily lives. The 2010 Committed attend **more than** monthly, read the Bible weekly plus, and **strongly agree** that their faith is significant in their daily lives.

The first category shown does not include church attendance. One unknown with the attendance question taken during the Covid-19 pandemic is that some respondents may have replied taking the pandemic into consideration and while other respondents considered normal times. We see a slightly greater drop-off between the first category and the 2010 Nominal category which could be associated with this issue. However, the difference is not large enough to impact the overall conclusions.

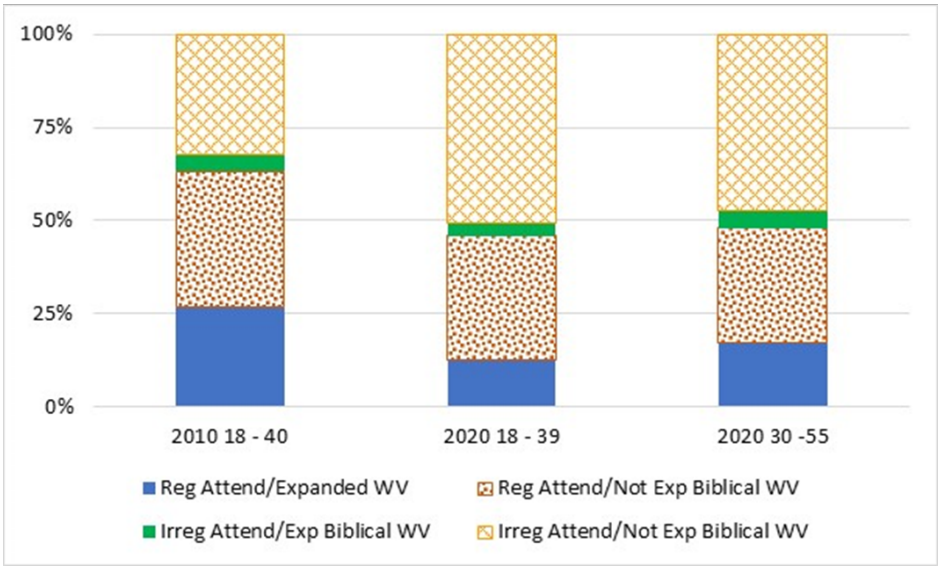
What we see is that the drop-off in the 2010 Nominal category is from 44% to 28% and the drop-off in the 2010 Committed category is down one half from 40% to 20%. These numbers reflect an astounding drop in the importance that Born Again Christians place on these simple religious activities.

Combining Worldview and Church Attendance (a key metric from our earlier book{1})

In our prior study of Born-Again Christians, one of the key divisions we used in looking at religious practices, religious beliefs and cultural practices was a combination of Biblical

Worldview and Church Attendance. We found that those Born-Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview and regular church attendance (twice a month or more), were much more likely to demonstrate biblical religious practices, beliefs, and cultural practices. So, we wanted to compare those results with the findings from our new survey.

Figure 8 Church Attendance and Expanded Biblical Worldview



The figure on the left compares the findings from 2010 with those from 2020 using the more stringent Expanded Biblical Worldview. The values shown are the percent of Born-Again Christians (so all columns add up to 100% even though the percentage of Born Again Christians is less in 2020). Two age ranges are used in 2020; the first one is basically the same age range used in 2010 (18 – 39) and the second age range (30 – 55) is very close to the age range of the 2010 survey aged by the ten years that have gone by.

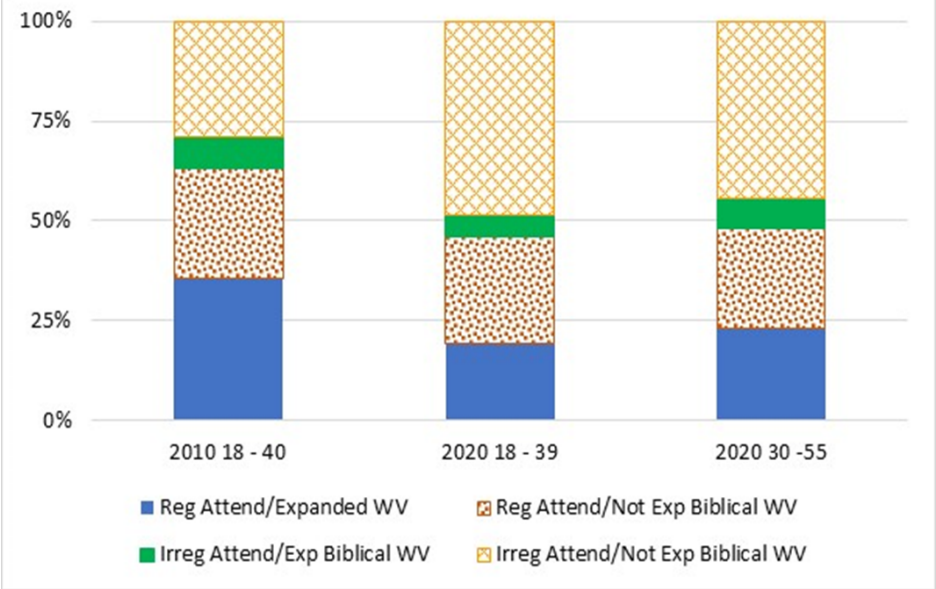
Looking at those with regular attendance and an Expanded Biblical Worldview we see a significant reduction among 18- to 29-year-olds in 2020 (27% down to 13%) with a lesser reduction among 30- to 55-year-olds down to 17%. The percentage of regular attenders without an Expanded Biblical Worldview has remained relatively constant. But of course, that does not mean that the people who stopped attending were those with an Expanded Biblical Worldview. It could be that many without it stopped attending while some decided that they did not believe all of the positions in the worldview but kept attending on a

regular basis.

The area showing a startling high level of growth are those attending monthly or less who do not hold to an Expanded Biblical Worldview. This is the square that ten years ago we wanted to drive down to a smaller number. Instead, it has grown by about 18% (from 32% to 50%).

Now let's examine the same chart using a Basic Biblical Worldview. We see nearly the same features as discussed above. A significant drop is shown in those with regular attendance and a Basic Biblical Worldview coupled with a significant increase in those with irregular attendance and no Basic Biblical Worldview.

Figure 9 Church Attendance and Basic Biblical Worldview among Born Again Christians in 2010 and 2020



Ultimate Purpose for Living

We wanted to explore what American young adults thought they were living their lives for. So we asked, "Which statement comes closest to describing your ultimate primary purpose for living?" The choices to select from were:

1. To be a good person and make others happy.

2. To serve God by living a life which proclaims Christ's grace.

3. To make it through each day with integrity.

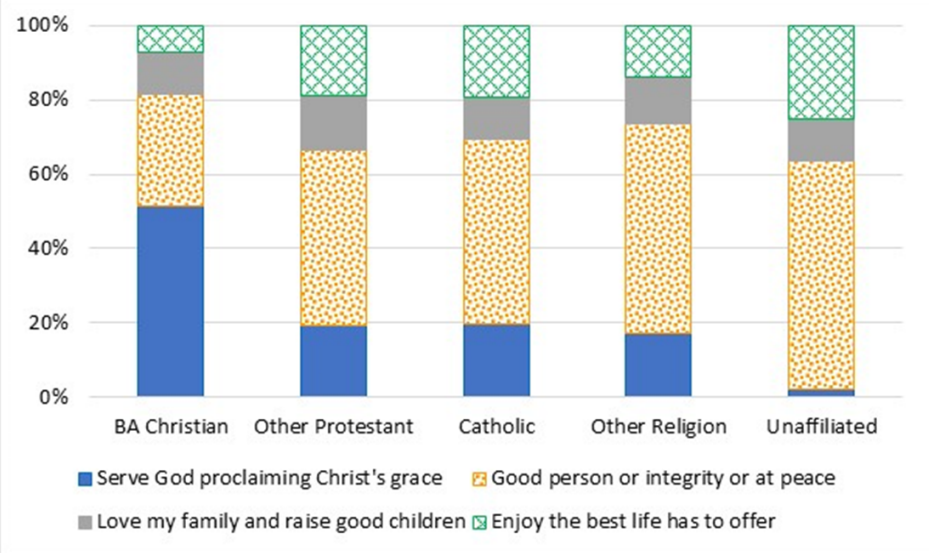
4. To live at peace with all.

5. To enjoy the best life has to offer, e.g. success, money, travel.

6. To love my family and raise loving, productive children.

Most of these answers sound like good purposes for life. But only one of them extends into eternity and recognizes our Creator and his "desire for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."{2} The answers to this question help identify those who are living their life as eternal beings rather than as temporal beings.

Figure 24 My Ultimate Purpose for Living
Americans 18 through 39

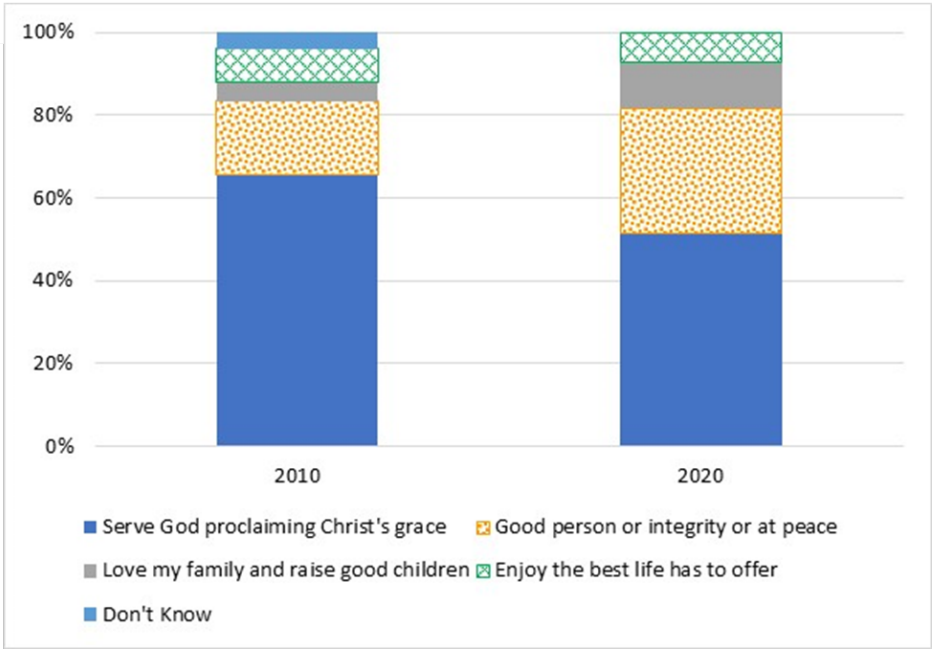


The results are charted in the graph to the left. As shown, just over half of Born Again Christians profess an eternal perspective. This means almost half do not, with most of those selecting a purpose that focuses on good behaviors in their personal life.

Every other religious group has very few that selected an eternal perspective as their ultimate purpose for living. Around forty to fifty percent of the other groups selects a purpose reflecting good behaviors.

It is interesting that only a small percentage of each group selected the family focused purpose for living. I would like to know if that would have been a larger number say fifty years ago.

Figure 25 My Ultimate Purpose for Living: 2010 and 2020
Born Again Christians 18 through 39



Finally, note this is another question that highlights the stark difference between the Unaffiliated and Born Again Protestants. We see that 57% of Born Again Protestants selected the eternal answer while only 2% of the Unaffiliated did the same. This result is a clear indicator that the Unaffiliated do not include a lot of Christians who do not want to affiliate with a particular Christian group.

For Born Again Christians, we can compare data from our 2010 survey with the 2020 survey as shown in the figure. The 2010 survey had the
same question as the 2020 survey, but it had more answers to choose from. For example, there were three answers that had an eternal perspective: *to serve God and live out His will for my life, to lead others to salvation in Jesus Christ, to praise and glorify God*. These three answers were grouped together to align with the 2020 answer: *To serve God by living a life which proclaims Christ's grace*.

As you can see the percentage of Born Again Christians who included God in their ultimate purpose for living dropped from 66% in 2010 to 51% in 2020, a significant drop. It appears that in 2020 people who did not name God in their answer opted to pick an admirable answer focused on themselves.

Relationship to a Basic Biblical Worldview

Consider the question of how many Born Again Christians accept a Basic Biblical Worldview and an eternal perspective on their ultimate purpose. We find that 88% of those with a Basic Biblical Worldview selected an ultimate purpose proclaiming God's grace. Conversely, 43% of those selecting an ultimate purpose proclaiming God's grace affirmed a Basic Biblical Worldview for their life (as compared with 25% for Born Again Christians as a whole). Thus, we find a fairly strong correlation between a biblical worldview and an eternal ultimate purpose for life.

Acceptance or Tolerance

Some of the key findings on this topic summarized at the beginning of this report are repeated below prior to going into the details.

Looking at Born Again Christians ages 18 through 39, we find:

- Only about one quarter (27%) of them disagree with the statement ". . . it is important to let people know that I affirm as true (at least for them) their religious beliefs and practices."

- At the same time, almost two thirds (65%) agree that tolerance is best defined as "Treating with respect people with ideas or actions that you believe to be wrong or misguided."

- This is another topic where we see somewhat conflicting results. Apparently, many Born Again Christian young adults think that you cannot believe someone is "wrong or misguided" when it comes to religion. Or they believe that "Treating with respect" means "affirming as true (at least for them)".

According to the Collins Dictionary, "Tolerance is the quality

of allowing other people to say and do what they like, even if you do not agree with or approve of it."{3} In today's culture, we find two conflicting understandings of the meaning of tolerance. One, following the idea of the dictionary meaning is, "treating with respect people with ideas or actions that you believe to be wrong or misguided." The second one influenced by postmodern philosophy and popularized by the secular media, is "valuing human beings equally and affirming their ideas as right for them." The second definition basically assumes that there are no absolute truths in our existence and therefore we have no basis to disagree with what someone else believes.

Which of these definitions holds sway among our population today?

To explore this question, we asked two different questions dealing with how to treat those who have a different religious viewpoint. The first question we asked on this topic is "What does Tolerance mean to you?" The respondents chose from four possible answers:

1. Treating with respect people with ideas or actions that you believe to be wrong or misguided.

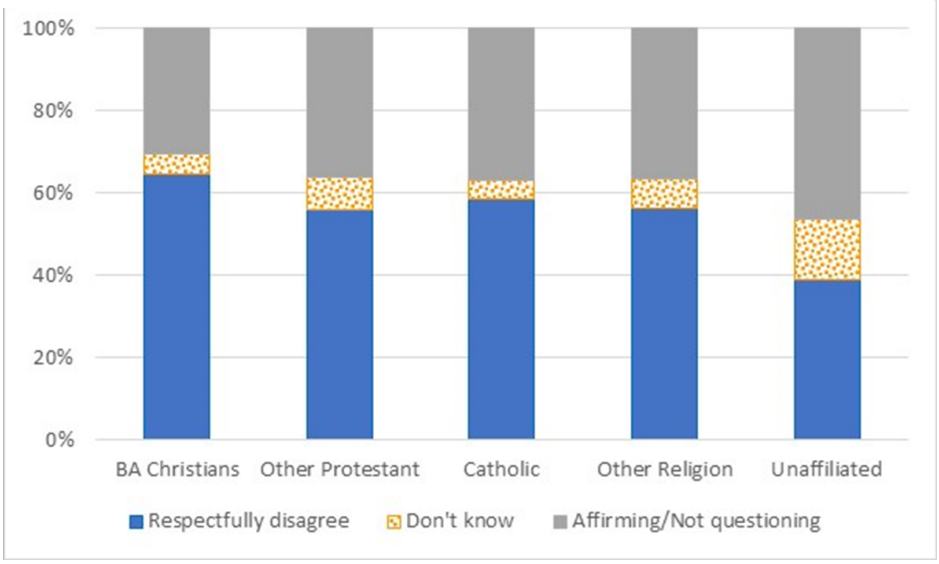
2. Not questioning another person's moral decisions.

3. Valuing human beings equally and affirming their ideas as right for them.

4. Don't know.

This question gives us information on how people interpret the word, not whether they apply tolerance in their dealings with others.

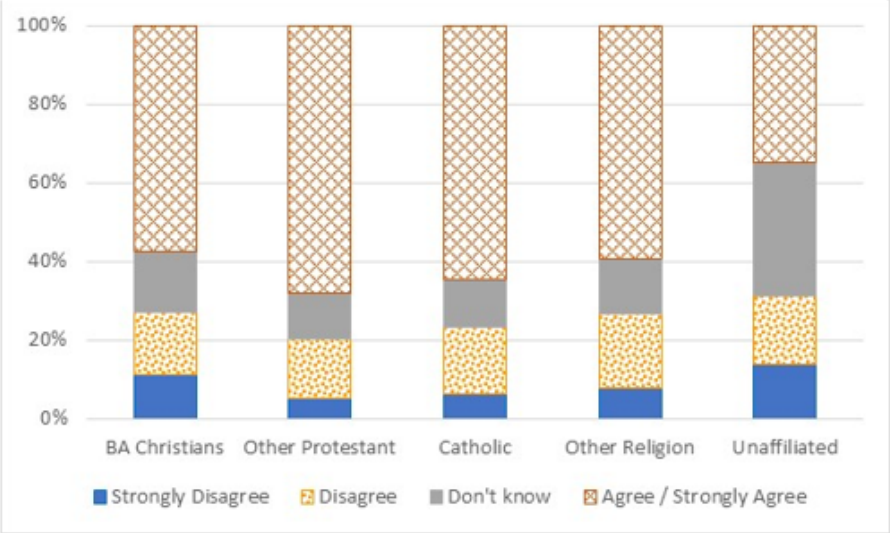
Figure 1 How 18 - 39 Year Old Americans Define Tolerance



In figure 1, we see how the definitions are distributed. Almost two thirds (65%) of young adult, Born Again Christians selected a classic definition of tolerance. As shown, over 50% of the other religious groups also selected a classic definition. But as one can see from the graph, a significant number of young adult Americans were selecting a different definition with the portions ranging from one third to almost one half of each religious group. So, it appears that a majority of the population is hanging onto the classic definition, but definitions which question the reality of absolute truths have a strong following.

Now let's look at how people apply tolerance in the area of religious beliefs. Are they quick to say, "I will respect you and your beliefs even though I believe them to be wrong"? Or are they going to follow the trend saying, "They may well be true for you."

Figure 2 Should I tell others I affirm as true their religious beliefs 18 – 39 Americans



To find out, we asked another question: "When discussing religious matters, I feel that it is important to let people know that I affirm as true (at least for them) their religious beliefs and practices," with the answer ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly. As an evangelical Christian, I would answer that I Disagree Strongly with that statement. I want them to know that I respect them as a person, but I believe I have been shown the absolutely true answer as to how man can be reconciled to our creator God. But somehow, when asked in this manner, Born Again Christians just don't seem to get the importance of disagreeing as shown in Figure 1.

As shown in the figure, only about one in four (27%) Born Again Christians disagree with the statement. This level tracks closely with the rest of the population. If one is agreeing with the statement, one is
either saying in religion what's not true for me can be true for you, or there are multiple religions that are the truth, or we should lie to others about the absolute truth of Christianity when discussing religion with them. All three of those options are clearly countered by the Bible which tells us that Jesus Christ is the source of absolute truth, that there is only one way to heaven, and that lying about the truth is against the nature of God.

The disconnect between the definition of tolerance and

applying tolerance in our interactions with other religions is striking. As noted in the initial summary, apparently many Born Again Christian young adults think that you cannot believe someone is "wrong or misguided" when it comes to religion. Or they believe that "Treating with respect" means "affirming as true (at least for them)." We don't have data to distinguish between these two options, but I suspect that both of them contribute to the current reluctance to lift up Jesus as God's one true answer to the fundamental problem of mankind.

Notes

1. Stephen Cable, Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behaviors of American Young Adults, 2012
2. 1 Timothy 2:4
3. Collins English Dictionary, Tolerance definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com)

©2021 Probe Ministries

Probe Religious Views Study 2020 – Do Christians Believe in Christ as the Only Savior of the World?

Steve Cable explores the results of Probe's new 2020 survey, examining what people believe about Jesus in His time on earth, and His claim to be the only way to the Father.

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. In

our first article, we saw a significant degradation in the percentage of American young adults who are born again{1} and profess a biblically informed worldview{2}. Perhaps a biblical worldview, as defined by the set of questions we used, is not an accurate gauge of an orthodox Christian belief.

In this article, we will look at several other areas designed to identify those people who closely align their thoughts with the teaching of the Bible. We will look at two areas of belief for all American young adults and for Born Again Protestants in greater detail:

1. Do you believe in some critical aspects of Jesus Christ and His time on earth?

2. Do you believe that Jesus was right in saying "No one comes to the Father except by Me"?

We will look at these two areas alone and then see how those with a biblical worldview align with these questions.

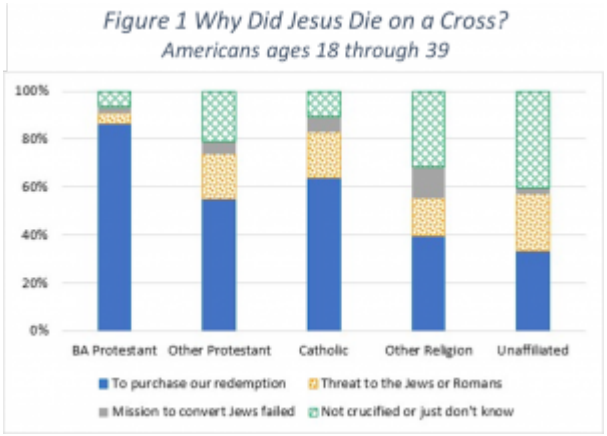
Topic 1: What About Jesus and His Time on Earth?

In our survey, we asked three questions specifically about Jesus. The first question was about what caused Jesus to die on a cross as given below.

1. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

a. He threatened the Roman authorities' control over Israel.
b. He threatened the stature of the Jewish leaders of the day.
c. To redeem us by taking our sins and our punishment upon Himself.
d. He never died on a cross.
e. He failed in his mission to convert the Jewish people into believers.
f. I don't know.

The responses for ages 18 through 39 are shown in Figure 1. As shown, Born Again Protestants have a far greater percentage, over 85%, stating that Jesus was crucified to purchase our redemption. One would suspect that all Protestant and Catholic leaders would want their people to know that Jesus' death on the cross was for their redemption. Yet, less than two thirds of each group selected that answer. Note that the answer to this question did not say that salvation was through grace alone. So even those with a works-based gospel should still select that answer.



A fair number of Other Protestants and Catholics (about 20% of each group) said that either the Jewish leaders or the Romans caused Jesus' death on the cross. But any Christian should realize that Jesus had to choose crucifixion. Prior attempts by authoritative groups demonstrated that they could not lay a hand on him otherwise.

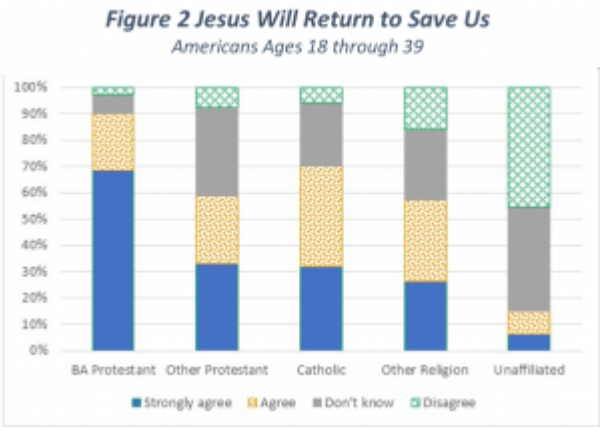
Interestingly, about 40% of Other Religions and 30% of the Unaffiliated say Jesus died to redeem us. They understand this is what Christians say about Jesus' crucifixion. It is the best answer for them because it doesn't say that Jesus' death actually worked to redeem us, only that He did
it to redeem us. Also note that roughly one third of the Other Religion category is made up of people who affiliate with Christian cults, e.g. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The second question is:

2. Jesus will return to this earth to save those who await His coming.

   a. **Answers ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree**.

This question is almost a quote of Hebrews 9:27-28 ESV, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” As you can see, this verse answers question 1 and question 2. The apostle Paul writing in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” He makes it clear that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth to call us to Himself.



The results for this question follow a similar pattern to those for the first question above with a little less surety shown among Christians. As shown, just over two thirds of Born Again Protestants strongly agree that Jesus will return to save. Meaning that almost one third of them are not absolutely sure of Jesus’ return.

For other Christian groups, only about one third of them strongly agree with this statement. Almost one third say they Disagree or Don’t Know about this statement.

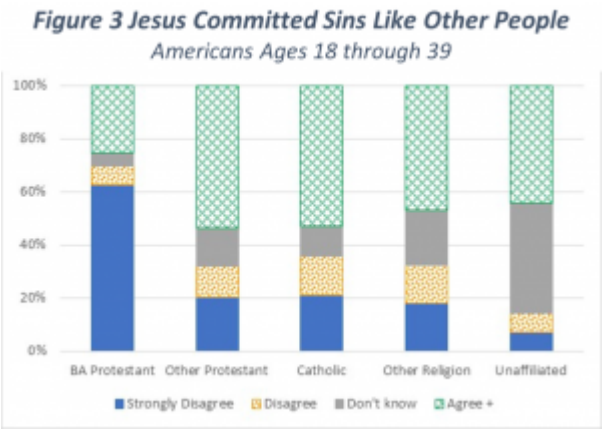
Once again, over half of those affiliated with Other Religions affirm what they believe to be taught by the Christian religion. At the same time, the Unaffiliated continue to show that very few of them affirm any Christian beliefs.

The third question (also used for determining a Basic Biblical Worldview) is:

3. When He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people.

a. **Answers ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly**

The Bible clearly states that Jesus lived a sinless life. For example, Hebrews 4:15 ESV states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin**.” And again in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “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.“ As indicated in this verse, God laid our sins upon Jesus in His earthly death. Jesus did not sin but He carried our sins to the cross and the grave to redeem us. If Jesus were a sinner like you and me, His death would have been for His own sin rather than for the sins of the world.

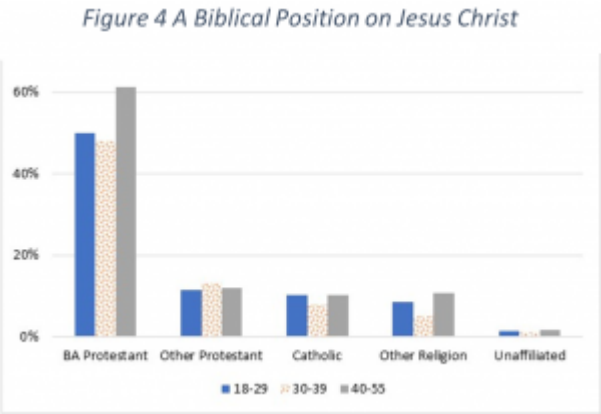


Young adult American beliefs about this statement follow a similar pattern as the first two questions. Once again, about one third of Born Again Protestants either Don’t Know or Agree with this statement. Having this large a number of Born Again Protestants who don’t accept a primary belief of Biblical Christianity is disappointing.

However, four out of five respondents who affiliated with Other Protestant or Catholic beliefs do not strongly believe that Jesus lived a sinless life. The Unaffiliated group continues to show their aversion to accepting any Christian religious doctrines.

Accepting a Doctrinally Consistent Set of Beliefs

What happens when we look at how many Born Again Protestants take a biblically consistent view on all three of these questions? Consider the results shown in Figure 4. First, we see that young adult Born Again Protestants drop from about two thirds for the individual questions down to about one half when looking at all three questions. It appears that about one half of those categorized as Born Again Protestants are trusting Jesus to save them but do not have a good understanding of biblical teaching on Jesus.



As you can see, all other religious groups drop to around one in ten or less with a good understanding of Jesus. The Unaffiliated drop to a level that is basically zero. In toto, about one out of six Americans age 55 and under have an understanding of who Jesus really is in these three fundamental areas.

Does Having a Basic Biblical Worldview Equate to Having a Biblical Understanding of Jesus?

For most people it does. Approximately 90% of people with a Basic Biblical Worldview have a biblical understanding of Jesus, i.e. answer the three Jesus questions from a biblical perspective. This finding (especially if true across other questions where many Born Again Christians ascribe to an unbiblical viewpoint) is important because the four simple questions which define a Basic Biblical Worldview identifies a set of people who also take a biblical view of Jesus' purpose.

Topic 2: Are there multiple ways to

heaven?

Pluralism is the belief that there are multiple ways to obtain a right relationship with God, including most if not all world religions. The Bible is very clear on how people can be reconciled to God and obtain eternal life. First, we cannot receive it through our own efforts at righteous living. This truth is addressed throughout the New Testament including Romans 3:23, "For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And Titus 3:5, "He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy . . ."

Second, we cannot receive it by placing our faith in some other person or deity. If we try, we are still weighed down by our sin, and that other person or deity has no standing before the living God. Even an angel of the living God has no standing on which to intercede for our salvation as we see in Hebrews 2:5, "For He did not put the world to come, about which we have been speaking, under the control of angels."

The only way God could redeem us was through the sacrifice of Jesus, fully God and fully man. As Romans goes on to say in 3:24, "But they are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And Titus 3:5 continues, "[T]hrough the washing of the new birth and
the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our savior."

Jesus clearly stated, "No one comes to the Father except through me." The high price of degradation and suffering paid through Jesus' life and death excludes the possibility of Jesus being just one of several options offered by God.

What do Americans believe about multiple ways to heaven? And, especially what do Born Again Christians believe? To determine who was a pluralist, we asked what the respondents thought

about the following two statements:

1. Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. **Answers from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly**

2. I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ. **Answers from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly**

Who Believes in Multiple Ways to God

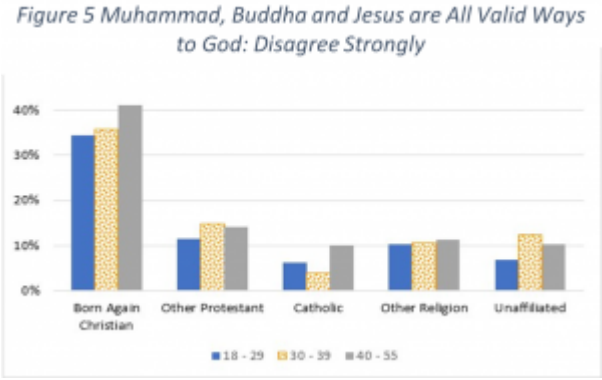


Figure 5 Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus are All Valid Ways to God: Disagree Strongly

First let's look at just question number one across the various religious groups, looking for the answer **Disagree strongly** as shown in Figure 5{3}. If someone disagrees with this statement, they could be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist, etc. The first thing you may notice is that all religious groups other than Born Again Christian all congregate around 5% to 15%. So, for all these groups, around one in ten people take a strong non-pluralistic view. Or turning it around, about 9 out of 10 of them are pluralists.

The real shocker jumping from this page is that over 60% of Born Again Christians are also pluralists. Apparently, a majority of Born Again Christians are ignorant about the basic teachings of their faith. Also, it is interesting and disturbing that the percentage of Born Again Christians who are not pluralistic is almost flat across the ages from 18 to 55. A strong majority of Born Again Christians are pluralists across that entire age range.

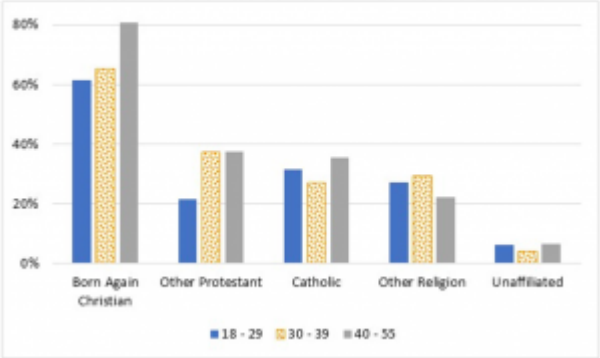
Who Believes Jesus is the Only Way

Now to narrow the question even further, we could have stated "Only Jesus taught valid ways to God." The percentage of people strongly agreeing with this statement should be a

subset of the people who disagreed strongly with the question above, “Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God.”

Instead, we asked this second question in a slightly different way but with the same intent: “I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ.” We thought that this question would be equivalent to the first one in the prior paragraph. But as we will see, people’s brains allow them to give answers that contradict each other.

Figure 6 Jesus is the Only Way to a True Relationship with God

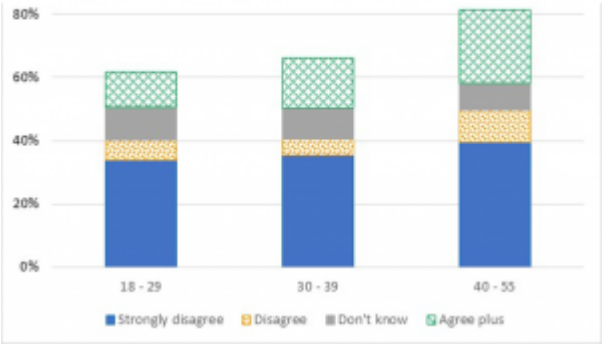


Comparing this chart with the prior one, we see that Born Again Christians are at least 25 percentage points higher for this second question. And, the other Christian religious groups are higher by about 25 percentage points as well. And even Other Religions are up by over ten percentage points. Only the Unaffiliated drop from the first question to the second, dropping by almost half from ten percentage points down to about five percentage points.

An Inconsistent Worldview Among Many Born Again Christians

The results outlined above are disconcerting in that if the answers to the two questions were consistent, we would see Figure 6 reporting lower numbers than Figure 5 which is clearly not the case. Logically, one could say that Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus are not all valid ways to God while still saying that Jesus is not the only way to God. You could believe, for example, that Buddha is the only one who taught a valid way to God. But, if you say that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God, then it follows that you believe that Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus cannot all be valid ways to God.

*Figure 7 What Born Again Christians Who Say **Jesus is the Only True Path to God** Say About **Mohammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Teaching Valid Ways to God***



However, the survey respondents show us that one does not have to give answers which logically support one another. Even if some of the respondents misread the statement, the difference between the two is great enough that it is safe to assume that the results are not primarily attributable to misreading.

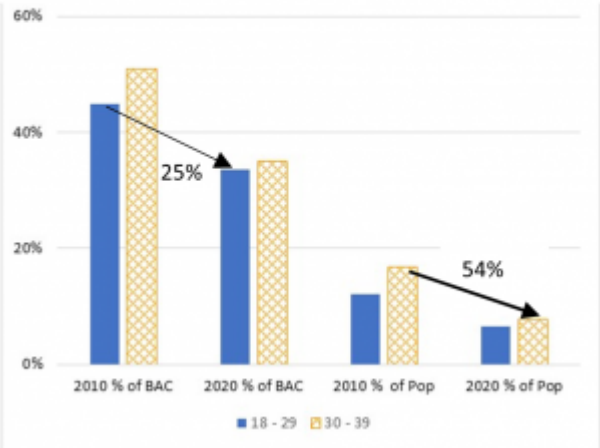
In Figure 7, we look at what the Born Again Christians who stated that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God said when responding to the question about Mohammad, Buddha and Jesus. First note that the total height of each column is the same as the Born Again Christian columns in Figure 6. As shown, almost half of each column represents those who did not strongly disagree with the pluralistic view. For the youngest adults, that upper portion is about evenly split between those who Don't Know and those who Agree or Strongly Agree that the three men taught valid ways to God. For those ages 40 through 55, we see that a significantly higher percentage affirm that all three men taught valid ways to God.

Based on these results, about one third of Born Again Christians appear to have a consistent biblical view toward pluralism. Another third appear to be totally in line with the pluralist position. The last third are those who want to say that Jesus is the only true path to God AND that Mohammad and Buddha also taught valid ways to God. In church, they may say that Jesus in the only way, but out in the world they act as if Muslims and Buddhists don't need to know this critical truth. These individuals have an incoherent worldview.

Changes over the Last Decade

How have the statistics on Born Again Christians and pluralism changed from 2010 to 2020? As shown in the figure, we see a significant drop in the percent of BACs who are not pluralists. Those age 18 to 29 drop by 25% (from 45% to 34% of all BACs) and those age 30 to 39 drop by 31% (from 51% to 35% of all BACs).

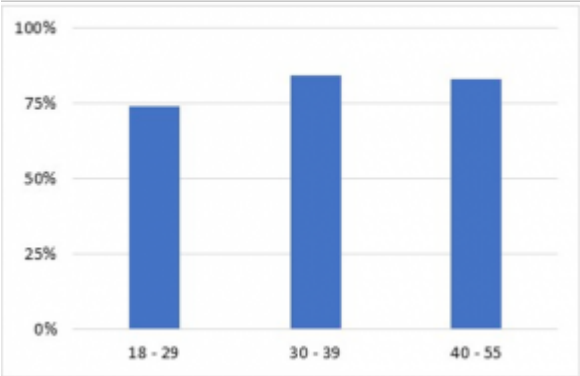
Figure 8 Born Again Christians Who Are Not Pluralists comparing 2010 with 2020



Of course, we need to remember that the percentage of BACs in the population has dropped as well. So, when we look at the percentage of Born Again Christians who are definitely not pluralists in our country the drop off is greater. As shown the number of those age 30 to 39 drops from 17% in 2010 to less than half of that number at 8% in 2020 (a drop of 54%).

Over the last decade, Born Again Christians in America have continued to grow in the number who are pluralists.

Figure 9 Born Again Christians with a Basic



What about that smaller subset of people who have a Basic Biblical Worldview? Do a majority of them also have a pluralistic worldview? The answer is no. As shown, between 75% and 85% of them are not pluralists.

This result is not a surprise since the Basic Biblical Worldview questions do not align well with a pluralistic view. However, the result that about one in four of Born Again Christians with a Basic Biblical Worldview appear to be pluralists is unsettling.

Countering the Negative Slide

If you are reading this, you may want to do something to help reverse this trend among Born Again Christians to misunderstand who Jesus is and His unique ability to redeem us and restore into a relationship with our Creator. Here a several suggestions that can help in this reversal.

Faithful prayer. Daily pray for the lost and against the forces of darkness so visibly arrayed against them. Pray for the saved, that they may take up the true gospel and cling to the eternal truth of Jesus.

Preach, teach and speak OFTEN about the events of the cross and the tomb.

- Explain that only someone perfectly sinless could undertake the task of reconciling us before a holy God. Make sure they understand that "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf in order that we may become the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21

- Explain that only God, in the person of Jesus Christ, could be that sinless sacrifice. God had to undergo the pain and suffering of separating Himself from His Son on the cross. "Though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:6-8

- Explain that the cost was so high, no other way to God is possible for sinful man. No one can come to the Father except through the Son and anyone may come through Him. "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, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave

himself as a ransom for all, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time." 1 Timothy 2:4-6

• Explain that Jesus' return is delayed only by the loving patience of God who is waiting for all to come to Jesus who will. "The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

• Explain that accepting pluralism will not automatically get your non-Christian friends into heaven. Only the truth of Christ presented to them by willing lips has the power to change their eternal destiny. If you care about them, you will share with them.

It is critical that every teenager, young adult, and older adult who crosses our path needs to have these truths reiterated for them. Use different techniques and different word pictures as you strive by the power of the Holy Spirit to continually make this message clear. We know God desires to work in their life.

Notes

1. A Born Again person in our survey results is someone who 1) has made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and 2) when asked what will happen to you after you die, they answer I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.
2. See our first article: Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020 for a description of the biblical worldview questions used.
3. Born Again Christians include Catholics who answered the born again questions to allow comparison with the 2010 survey, but in the Catholic category we include all Catholics including those who are born again. About 20% of Catholics

affirm the two born again questions.

Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020

The results are in from Probe's newest assessment of the state of biblical beliefs in America 2020, and the news is not good.

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. From a biblical worldview to doctrinal beliefs and pluralism to the application of biblical teaching to sexual mores, the number of Americans applying biblical teaching to their thinking has dropped significantly over this period. Unfortunately, the greatest level of decline is found among Born Again Protestants.

Our previous survey, the 2010 *Probe Culturally Captive Christians* survey{1}, was limited to Born Again Americans' 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.

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{2}, 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.

Two questions were used in both surveys to categorize people as Born Again{3}. Those questions are:

1. Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today? **Answer: YES**

2. What best describes your belief about what will happen to you after you die? **Answer:**
I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

In our 2020 survey, we delve into what American's believe regarding biblical worldview, basic biblical doctrine, pluralism and tolerance, religious practices, applications of religious beliefs to cultural issues, and more. In this first release, we lay the groundwork by explaining the trends in religious affiliation over time using a number of different surveys. Then we look deeper, examining how many of those of each religious faith group adhered to a biblical worldview in 2010 and now in 2020.

Laying the Groundwork: American Religious Affiliations Over Time

How have the religious affiliations of American young adults changed over the years? We have examined data over the last fifty years{4} to answer this question. From 1972 through the early 1990's, the portion of the population affiliated with each major religious group stayed fairly constant. But since then, there have been significant changes. As an example, looking at data from the General Social Survey (GSS){5} surveys of 1988, 1998, 2010, and 2018 and our 2020 Religious Views survey, we see dramatic changes as shown in Figure 1. Note that the GSS survey asks, "Have you ever had a "born again" experience?" rather than the two questions used in the Probe surveys (see above). Looking at the chart it appears that the question used in the GSS surveys is answered yes more often than the two questions used by Probe.

As shown, the most dramatic change is the increase in the percentage of those who **do not** select a Christian affiliation (i.e., Other Religion and Unaffiliated). Looking at GSS data for those age 18–29, the percentage has grown from 20% of the population in 1988 to over 45% of the population in 2018. Most of this growth is in the number of Unaffiliated (those who select Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing in Particular). In fact, those from other religious faiths{6} grew from 7% to 10% over this time period while **the Unaffiliated almost tripled** from 13% to 35% of the population.

The Pew Research data (not shown in the graph) shows an even greater increase, growing from 27% in 1996 to 59% in 2020. The Probe data from 2020 tracks the GSS data, supporting the overall growth trend shown in the figure.

Looking at the Unaffiliated for the 30–39 age group, we see the same growth trend growing from 9% to 30%. Comparing the 18–29 data with the 30–39 data, we can determine that more people are transitioning to Unaffiliated as they mature. For example, we see 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 of the people in their twenties became Unaffiliated in their thirties. This result runs directly counter to the supposition of many that the growth in Unaffiliated will dissipate as young adults age and return to churches to raise their families.{7}

Considering the other religions shown in Figure 1, we see that the group seeing the greatest decline is Other Protestants, i.e. Protestants who did not profess to being born again. As shown, this group dropped by half (from 26% down to 13%) from 1988 to 2018. Similarly, those professing to be Catholics dropped by one quarter (from 24% to 18%) over the same time period.

In the GSS data, Born Again Protestants are remaining a relatively constant percent of the population. There has been

a steady decline in those ages 18–29, but those in their thirties have not declined over this time period. This data appears to indicate that some young adults in their late twenties and early thirties are undergoing a "born again" experience.

However, while Born Again Protestants have remained stable, those who say they are affiliated with an Evangelical church have begun to decline somewhat. Pew Research surveys{8} of at least 10,000 American adults do show a decline in young adult Evangelicals from 28% in 2007 to 25% in 2014 to 20% in 2019.

Is a Christian Biblical Worldview Common Among Young Americans?

In assessing the worldview of people, we were not able to sit down and talk to them to fully understand their worldview. So, our 2010 and 2020 surveys include specific questions which help us identify someone with a Christian biblical worldview. A set of four questions is used to assess what we call a Basic Biblical Worldview. Two additional questions are added to get to a fuller assessment first used by the Barna Group. We use the six questions together to assess what we call an Expanded Biblical Worldview. The questions are as follows:

Basic Biblical Worldview

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.{9}**

2. The Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings: **Strongly Agree**

3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**

4. When He lived on earth, Jesus Christ committed sins like other people: **Disagree Strongly**

Additional Beliefs for an Expanded Biblical Worldview

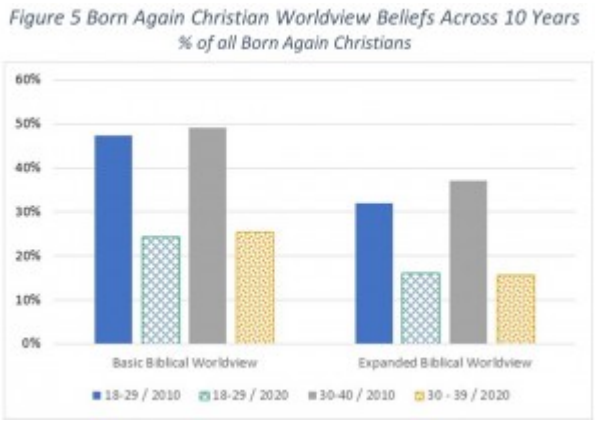
5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**

6. Some people believe there are moral truths (such as murder is always wrong) that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Others believe that moral truth always depends upon circumstances. Do you believe there are moral truths that are unchanging, or does moral truth always depend upon circumstances: **There are moral truths that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time**.

First, how do different Christian groups respond to these questions? In Figure 4, we show the percentage of each group in 2020 who have either a Basic Biblical Worldview or an Expanded Biblical Worldview. We use three groups of affiliations: Born Again Christians, Other Protestants, and Catholics.{10} On the left half of the chart, we indicate the percentage with a Basic Biblical Worldview by affiliation and age group. Those in the Born Again Christian group are at about 25% (about 1 out of 4) for those under the age of 40 and then jump up to 35% (about 1 out of 3) for those between 40 and 55. For those in the Other Protestant group, much less than 10% (1 out of 10) possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. Almost no Catholics possess a Basic Biblical Worldview. For both the Other Protestant group and the Catholics, the concept the vast majority do not agree with is that you cannot earn your way to heaven via good works. The other three questions are also much lower for Other Protestants and Catholics than for Born Again Christians.

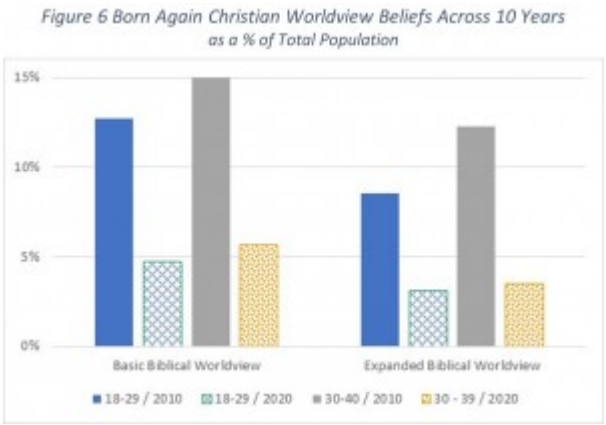
Adding in the questions on Satan and absolutes for an Expanded Biblical Worldview, we see each group drop significantly. The Born Again Christian group runs about 15% below age 40 and 25%

(or 1 in 4) from 40 to 55. The other two groups drop from almost none to barely any.



Now let's compare these 2020 results with the results from our 2010 survey. Figure 5 shows the results across this decade for Born Again Christians looking at the percent who agree with the worldview answers above. As shown, there has been a dramatic drop in both the Basic Biblical Worldview and the Expanded Biblical Worldview.

If we compare the 18–29 result from 2010 with the 30–39 result from 2020 (i.e., the same age cohort 10 years later), we see a drop from 47% to 25% for the Basic Biblical Worldview and from 32% to 16% for the Expanded Biblical Worldview. **So, the percentage of Born Again Christians with a Biblical Worldview (of either type) has been cut in half over the last decade.** This result is a startling degradation in worldview beliefs of Born Again Christians over just 10 years.



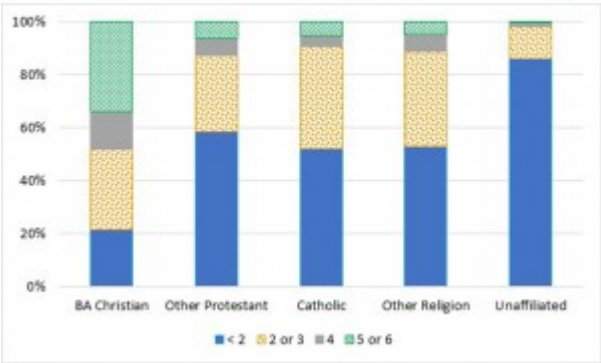
However, because the percent of the population who profess to being born again has dropped over the last ten years as well, the situation is even worse. We need to look at the percent of Americans of a particular age range who hold to a Biblical Worldview. Those results are shown in Figure 6. Once again, comparing the 18–29 age group from 2010 with the same age group ten years later now 30–39, we find an even greater drop off. For the Basic Biblical Worldview, we see a drop off from 13% of the population down to 6%. For the Expanded Biblical Worldview, the decline is from 9% down to just over 3% (a drop off of two thirds).

The drop off seen over this ten-year period is more than dramatic and extremely discouraging. In 2010, we had about 10% of the population modeling an active biblical worldview. Although small, 10% of the population means that most people would know one of these committed Christians. At between 6% and 3%, the odds of impacting a significant number of Americans are certainly reduced.

However, we cannot forget that the percent of biblical worldview Christians in the Roman Empire in AD 60 was much less than 1% of the population. Three hundred years later virtually the entire empire was at least nominally Christian. If we will commit ourselves to "proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light,"{11} God will bring revival to our land.

Second, how do various religious groups stack up against these questions?

Figure 7 Number of Biblical Worldview Topics Affirmed by Americans ages 18 - 39



Rather than look at the two biblical worldview levels discussed above, we will look at how many of the six biblical worldview questions they answered were consistent with a biblical worldview. In the chart, we look at 18- to 39-year-old individuals grouped by religious affiliation and map what portion answered less than two of the questions biblically, two or three, four, or more than four (i.e., five or six).

You can see that there are three distinct patterns. First, Born Again Christians where almost half of them answered four or more questions from a biblical perspective (the top two sections of each bar). Then, we see Other Protestants, Catholics{12}, and Other Religions{13} chart about the same, with over half answering zero or one and very few answering

more than three.

Finally, we see that the Unaffiliated have over 85% who answer zero or one. This result is one of many we have identified over the years, clearly showing that the Unaffiliated are not active Christians who do not want to affiliate with a particular group. Some have suggested this possibility, but the data does not support that hopeful concept.

Third, what do they say about God and His relationship to the world?

People have many different views of God or gods in this life. In this chart, we look at how 18-to 39-year old respondents define God across the different religious affiliations used in the prior chart. Our respondents were asked: Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God? They were given the following answers to choose from (without the titles).

1. **God Rules**: God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today.

2. **Impersonal Force**: God refers to the total realization of personal human potential OR God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.

3. **Deism**: God created but is no longer involved with the world today.

4. **Many gods**: There are many gods, each with their different power and authority.

5. **No God**: There is no such thing as God.

6. **Don't Know**: Don't know

Once again, the answers fall into three groups. A vast majority of Born Again Christians (~80%) believe in a creator God who is still active in the world today. It is somewhat

surprising that over 20% ascribe to a different view of God. The second group consists of Other Protestants who do not claim to be born again, Catholics and Other Religions. These groups are remarkably similar in their responses with around 40% who believe in an active, creator God. So, the remaining 60% have a different view. The third group are the Unaffiliated with less than 10% professing belief in an active, creator God. Over 50% believe in no God or they just don't know. **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.** We must admit that **America is not a Judeo-Christian nation** as the belief in God is central to Judeo-Christian views. From an evangelistic viewpoint, one needs to be prepared to explain why someone should believe in a creator God. The Probe Ministries website, www.probe.org, is an excellent place to explore the topic.{14}

Summary

This document begins the process of understanding the status and trends of religious beliefs and behaviors in the America of this third decade of the twenty first century. Several findings addressed above are worth highlighting in summary.

- Unaffiliated Americans continue their growth toward one half of the population which began before the turn of this century. The current number of young adults (under the age of 40) who are **unaffiliated ranges between one third and one half of our population**.

- The percentage of young adult Americans who claim to be Born Again Protestants has declined slightly among the youngest group (18–29) but has remained fairly constant during this century.

- Other Protestants and Catholics have seen marked declines during this century. The percentage of **young adult Other Protestants has dropped by one half** (from about one quarter of the population to about one eighth) since 1988.

- Born Again Christians are the only group to have a significant number of adherents who profess to having a Basic Biblical Worldview. This worldview is measured by the answers to four very basic questions at the heart of Christian doctrine. Even among this group, **only about one in four (25%) of them hold to a Basic Biblical Worldview**.

- Over the last ten years, the number of young adult (18–39) Born Again Christians with **a Basic Biblical Worldview has dropped by two thirds** from almost 15% of the population down to about 5%. This is a remarkable and devastating drop in one decade.

- Just under one half of Born Again Christians agree with more than three of the six worldview questions. Amongst other Christian groups and the population as a whole less than one in ten do so.

- **Overall, only about one third of Americans 55 and under believe in an active, creator God.**

In our next release, we will look at how American young adults

- react to the doctrine of Jesus Christ,

- believe that Jesus is the only path to heaven, and

- have a classic view of tolerance.

In the meantime, be in prayer about what you can do in your sphere of influence to stem the trends listed above.

Notes

1. 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*.
2. The 717 respondents equated to 747 equivalent people when weighted to adjust for differences between those surveyed and the distribution of gender, ethnicity, ages, and location as

given by the United States Census Bureau.
3. Our 2010 survey was facilitated by the Barna Group and I would presume they commonly use these two questions in other surveys to identify born again Christians.
4. We have looked at religious affiliation from Pew Research, GSS, PALS, Barna Group and others.
5. 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.
6. Note that the Other Religions category includes Christian cults (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses), Jews, and other world religions.
7. In future releases, we will also see that the Unaffiliated are very unlikely to hold to basic Christian beliefs.
8. 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.
9. 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; and don't know.
10. Born Again Christians include Catholics who answered the born again questions to allow comparison with the 2010 survey but in the Catholic category we include all Catholics including those who are born again.
11. 1 Peter 2:9
12. Catholics here include about 20% who profess to be born again. That subset is included in both the BA Christian column and the Catholic column in Figure 7 and Figure 8.
13. One of the reasons that Other Religions include some that

answer more than three worldview questions is that Mormons and other Christian cults are included in that category.
14. Articles on our website addressing this topic include Evidence for God's Existence, There is a God, Does God Exist: A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources, The Impotence of Darwinism, Darwinism: A Teetering House of Cards, and many others.

©2021 Probe Ministries

Atheist Myths and Scientism

Steve Cable exposes some atheist myths and the false ideology of scientism, all designed to destroy people's faith.

A Two-Pronged Attack Against Christianity



Atheist attacks against American Christianity are gaining more traction in our society. Their success can be readily seen in the growth of the number of American young adults who do not profess to be Christians. Tracking recent trends, around 50% of American Millennials fall in this category, with most of those identifying as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. More identify as nothing in particular than as atheist, but the atheist attacks certainly have a role to play in their ambivalent feelings about Christianity.

What have atheists done to create a cultural milieu that is drawing more and more young Americans away from Christianity?

In this article, we will focus on two prominent prongs of the attack against Christianity. Those prongs are:

1. Fabricating myths around the premise that Christianity and modern science are enemies of one another and have been so since the advent of modern science, and

2. Promoting the philosophy of scientism as the only way to view science.

First, the myths are an attempt to cause people to believe that the Christian church and a Christian worldview were and are anti-science. They want us to believe that the findings of science are counter to the make-believe teachings of Christianity and the Bible. They want us to look back at history and believe that the church was actively opposing and trying to suppress scientific knowledge. As Michael Keas tells us in his 2019 book *Unbelievable*, "These stories are nothing but myths. And yet some leading scientists . . . offer these stories as unassailable truth. These myths make their way into science textbooks . . . (and) enter into popular culture, whereby the myths pass as accepted wisdom."{1}

However, many historians and philosophers have correctly pointed out that the Christian worldview of an orderly universe created by an involved God produced the mindset that gave birth to the scientific revolution. In his book *How the West Won*, sociologist Rodney Stark states, "Christianity was essential to the rise of science, which is why science was a purely Western phenomenon . . . science only arose in Christian Europe because only medieval Europeans believed that science was possible and desirable. And the basis of their belief was their image of God and his creation."{2} In this article, we consider the key figures who propagated this myth and some of the falsified stories they have foisted upon us.

Second, they want us to accept scientism as the only valid way to view the role of science in our understanding of the

universe. What is scientism? In his 2018 book *Scientism and Secularism*, professor of philosophy J. P Moreland defines it this way: "Scientism is the view that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality. . . . What is crucial to scientism is . . . the thought that the scientific is much more valuable than the non-scientific. . . . When you have competing knowledge claims from different sources, the scientific will always trump the non-scientific."{3}

But scientism "is not a doctrine of science; rather it is a doctrine of philosophy . . . (In fact,) scientism distorts science."{4} This philosophical doctrine came into favor among the public not because of scientific results, but rather as the result of proponents presenting it in popular ways as if it were the undisputable truth. As Moreland points out, "It is not even a friend of science but rather its enemy."{5}

Myths about Christianity and Science

Atheists want to create stories to demonstrate that Christians are and have been the enemies of scientific exploration and discovery. Why this drive to recreate the past? They want to encourage people to turn away from Christianity as an enemy of science and weaken the faith of believers.

As Michael Keas makes evident in *Unbelievable*, this thinking is not based on reality. Instead, historical myths have been created to bolster their position either as a result of ignorance of the actual history or intentional deceit. After creating these myths, they use the educational system and mass media to ingrain these myths into the thinking of the masses.

Keas specifically looks at seven myths used for this purpose which we find embedded in our textbooks and proclaimed by popular television programs. To understand the nature of these myths, let's consider two of the ones discussed by Keas.

Many of you learned of the Dark Ages, a period of time between

A.D. 500 and 1500 where textbooks have claimed that science and the arts were stifled by the control of the church which opposed scientific understanding. In truth, this view is not supported by historical evaluations of that time. As reported in Stark's revealing book, *How the West Won*, "Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Dark Ages myth is that it was imposed on what was actually "one of the great innovative eras of mankind." During this period technology was developed and put into use on a scale no civilization had previously known.{6} Keas found that this myth first appeared in textbooks in the 1800s but did not surface with an anti-Christian slant until the 1960s. Carl Sagan, and later Neal deGrasse Tyson, would help promulgate this myth on television through their *Cosmos* series.

Another myth exploded by Keas is that "Copernicus demoted humans from the privileged 'center of the universe' and thereby challenged religious doctrines about human importance."{7} In fact, Copernicus as a Christian did not consider his discovery that the earth orbited the sun a demotion for earth or humans. What Copernicus saw as unveiling the mysteries of God's creation over time began to be pictured as a great humiliation for Christians. In the 1950s some scientific writers began using the term "the Copernican principle" to refer to the idea "that the Earth is not in a central, specially favored position"{8} in the cosmos. As one Harvard professor has noted, "This is the principle of mediocrity, and Copernicus would have been shocked to find his name associated with it."{9}

Keas also documents how this atheist strategy also pretends that many early scientists were not Christians. Johannes Kepler, known for his discovery of the three laws of planetary motion, is cited by Sagan in *Cosmos* as someone who "despaired of ever attaining salvation,"{10} implying that Kepler always felt this way. Sagan leads one to believe that in his astronomical discoveries Kepler was somehow freed from this

concern. Yet from Kepler's own writing it is very clear that he was a Christian, telling people shortly before his death that he was saved "solely by the merit of our savior Jesus Christ." And speaking of his scientific endeavors he wrote, "God wanted us to recognize them [i.e. mathematical natural laws] by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts."{11}

Much of the reported relationship between science and Christianity is a myth made up to strengthen the atheist position that science repudiates Christianity and makes it superfluous and dangerous in today's enlightened world. Nothing could be further from the truth, as a Christian worldview was foundational for the development and application of the scientific method.

Methodological Naturalism: A Farce

What about the prevalence of scientism, a belief system claiming that the hard sciences provide the only genuine knowledge of reality?

When considered carefully, the whole concept of scientism is a farce. Why? Because as philosopher J. P. Moreland points out, "Strong scientism is a philosophical assertion that claims that philosophical assertions are neither true nor can be known; only scientific assertions can be true and known."{12} So the premise is self-refuting. They are saying that only scientific facts can be objectively true. Thus, the statement that only scientific facts can be true must be false because it is a philosophical assertion, not a scientific fact.

Another example of the faulty philosophy behind scientism comes in their insistence on adopting methodological naturalism as a criterion for science. Methodological naturalism is "the idea that, while doing science, one must seek only natural causes or explanations for scientific

data."{13} This idea immediately demotes science from being the search for the truth about observable items in this universe to being the search for the most plausible natural cause no matter how implausible it may be.

Although they appear to be unsure as to whether to apply the concept uniformly to all forms of science, its proponents are sure that it definitely should be applied to the field of evolutionary science. They make the *a priori* assumption that life as we know it originated and developed by strictly impersonal, unintelligent forces. No intelligence can be allowed to enter the process in any way. This approach to trying to understand the current state of life on earth is certainly an interesting exercise leading to a multitude of theories and untestable speculations. It is a challenging mental exercise and is valuable as such. However, scientism does not stop there. They declare that their unsupported (and I would say unsupportable) theories **must be the truth** about our origins, at least until replaced by another strictly naturalistic theory.

This approach seems to be an odd (and unfruitful) way to go after the truth due to at least three reasons. First, many other areas of science which include intelligent agents in their hypotheses are respected and their results generally accepted, common examples being archaeology and forensic science. Second, the current state of evolutionary science primarily appears to be tearing holes in prior theories, e.g. Darwinian evolution, rather than closing in on a plausible explanation. And, third, scientists are continuing to find evidence supporting a hypothesis that intelligent actions were involved in the formulation of life on earth.

If the sum of the available evidence is more directly explained by the involvement of some intelligent agent, then it would be reasonable to accept that potential explanation as the leading contender for the truth until some other answer is developed that is more closely supported by the available

evidence. This is the attitude embraced by the intelligent design community. They embrace it because so much of the evidence supports it, including

1. the inability of other hypothesis to account for the first appearance of life,
2. the complexity of the simplest life forms with no chain of less complex forms leading up to them,
3. the relativity sudden appearance of all types of life forms in the fossil record,
4. the fine tuning of the parameters of the universe to support life on earth, and
5. the emergence of consciousness within humans.

In contrast, those supporting theistic evolution appear to do so in order to conform to the methodological naturalism of their peers. They claim to believe that God does intervene in nature through acts such as the miracles of Jesus and His resurrection. But they claim that God did not intervene in the processes leading up to the appearance of mankind on this planet. In my opinion, they take this stance not because the evidence demands it, but because methodological naturalism does not allow it. As Moreland opines, "Methodological naturalism is *one bad way* to put science and Christianity together."{14}

Things Science Cannot Explain / God of the Gaps

As we have seen, scientism is a philosophy that says the only real knowledge to be found is through application of the hard sciences and that no intelligence can be involved in any of our hypotheses. So, they believe hard science must be capable of explaining everything (even if it currently doesn't).

In this section we will consider some very important things that science cannot now nor ever be able to explain. In his

book, *Scientism and Secularism*, J. P. Moreland lists five such things for us.

First, the origin of the universe cannot be explained by science. Why? Science has been able to identify that the universe most likely had a beginning point. But as Moreland points out, "Science can provide evidence that the universe had a beginning; it cannot, even in principle, explain that beginning; that is, it cannot say what caused it. . . No real thing can pop into existence from nothing."{15} He points out three specific logical reasons science cannot address this issue:

1. A scientific explanation cannot be used to explain the universe because scientific explanations presuppose the universe.

2. Science cannot explain the origin of time and without time no explanation can be considered.

3. Coming-into-existence is not a process which can be reviewed and explained because it is an instantaneous event. Something either does or does not exist.

Second, the origin of the fundamental laws of nature. All scientific explanations presuppose these laws. We can conceive of a universe where these laws might be different resulting in a different reality, but we cannot explain how our universe came into being with the laws we see active around us.

Third, the fine-tuning of the universe to support life. As far as science is concerned the parameters of the forces within this universe can be observed but we cannot know what caused them to assume the values they do. However, in recent years it has been discovered that our universe "is a razor's edge of precisely balanced life permitting conditions."{16} Over one hundred parameters of this universe, such as the force of gravity, the charge of an electron, the rate of expansion of the universe, etc., must be precisely balanced or there could

be no life in the universe. Science cannot answer the question of why our universe can support life.

Fourth, the origin of consciousness. In this context consciousness is the ability to be aware of oneself and entertain thoughts about things which are outside of oneself and possibly outside of one's experience. From a naturalist point of view, "the appearance of mind is utterly unpredictable and inexplicable."{17} However, God may choose to create conscious beings; beings that are capable of asking about and discovering the works of their creator.

Fifth, the existence of moral laws. As the late atheist philosopher Mackie admitted, the emergence of moral properties would constitute a refutation of naturalism and evidence for theism: "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."{18}

These five important questions can never be answered if scientism's flawed premise were true. However, Christian theism answers each of these questions and those answers are true if God is the real creator of the universe.

Integrating Christianity and Science

Scientism claims that you cannot integrate Christianity and science. Instead, they claim all theology is nonsense and only science exists to give us the truth. As Moreland points out, "One of the effects of scientism, then, is making the ridicule of Christianity's truth claims more common and acceptable (which is one of scientism's goals)."{19}

If this view is clearly wrong, how should we as Christians view science and its relationship with Christianity and the Bible? First, we need to understand that the topics addressed by science are in most cases peripheral to the topics covered

in the Bible. The Bible is primarily concerned with God's efforts to restore people from their state as enemies of God back into eternal fellowship with Him.

One area of significant interaction is the question of how this universe came to exist in its current state. How one views that interaction (i.e. as adversarial or as complementary) depends on whether they are clinging to the unsupported myth of unguided evolution or to the new science of intelligent design. As Moreland states, "Science has done more to confirm the Christian God's existence than to undermine it, and science has provided little or no evidence against belief of theism. Science has, however, raised challenges to various biblical texts, and Christians need to take those challenges seriously."{20}

Moreland suggests there are five ways to relate issues in science and Christian philosophy. Let's consider two of those methods. One is the complementarity model. In this model, two disciplines are addressing the same object or feature but from different, essentially non-overlapping perspectives. "Neither one purports to tell the whole story, but both make true claims about reality."{21} This is the model used by advocates of theistic evolution who take as gospel the latest claims of evolutionary science while saying of course God kicked off the whole process including us in His plan for the universe.

Another way to interact is called the direct interaction model. In this model, theories from theology and from science may directly interact with one another on some topic, either positively or negatively. One area might raise rational difficulties for the other. This approach has the most potential for bringing information from different fields together into a fuller picture of truth. Intelligent design is an area where this model is applied as it questions the validity of eliminating intelligence from the options considered in understanding the development of life on earth.

Since scientism swears that science is the only source of truth, even when scientists cannot agree as to what that scientific truth is, they want to discount inputs from any other source no matter how helpful. So the direct interaction model is a difficult road to take. What are the rational criteria for going against the experts? Moreland suggests there are four criteria for Christian theologians to decide to take this road.

1. Make sure there is not a reasonable interpretation of the Bible that resolves the tension.

2. There is a band of academically qualified scholars who are unified in rejecting the view held by a majority of the relevant experts. In this way, we know that there are people who are familiar with the details of the majority view, who do not believe that it is true.

3. There are good non-rational explanations for why the expert majority holds the problematic view. For historical, sociological, or theological reasons, the majority is not ready to abandon their position rather than because their evidence is overwhelming. "For example, the shift from creationism to Darwinism was primarily, though not exclusively, a shift in philosophy of science."{22}

Given the large amount of evidential support for a Christian worldview, any view that is counter to central components of a Christian worldview should be rejected precisely for that reason. Any view meeting the first three criteria that also attempts to undermine key parts of a Christian worldview will be overwhelmed by the significant rational support for a Christian worldview.

As followers of the God of real truth, Christians need to realize that the so-called truths being taught to justify science over theology are in fact myths and/or self-refuting statements. Every Christian needs to be able to address these

fallacies in today's popular science culture. Equip your young adults with this understanding and more by attending our summer event called Mind Games Camp. More information can be found at probe.org/mindgames.

Notes

1. Michael Keas, *Unbelievable: 7 Myths About the History and Future of Science and Religion*, ISI Books, 2019, 2.
2. Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, ISI Books, 2014 p. 304, 315.
3. J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*, Crossway, 2018, 26 and 29.
4. Ibid., p. 23.
5. Ibid., p. 55.
6. Stark, p. 76.
7. Keas, p. 4 and Chapter 6.
8. Herman Bondi, *Cosmology*, Cambridge University Press, 1952.
9. Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, Belknap Press, 2006.
10. Sagan, 1980 *Cosmos* TV series, episode 3.
11. Kepler, letter to Herwart von Hohenburg, April 9/10, 1599.
12. Moreland, p. 52.
13. Ibid., p. 131.
14. Ibid., p. 159.
15. Ibid., p. 138.
16. Ibid., p. 146.
17. Ibid., p. 151.
18. J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, Oxford, 1982, p. 115.
19. Moreland, p. 31.
20. Ibid., p.174.
21. Ibid., p. 184.
22. Ibid., p. 192.

©2019 Probe Ministries