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

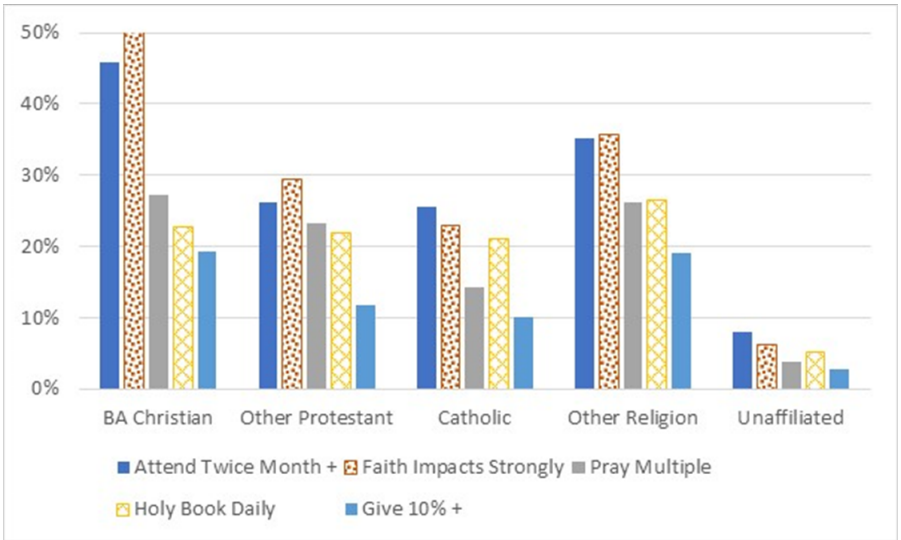
We will begin by looking at two different levels of religious activity: a Nominal Level and a Committed Level as shown in Table 1 below.

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

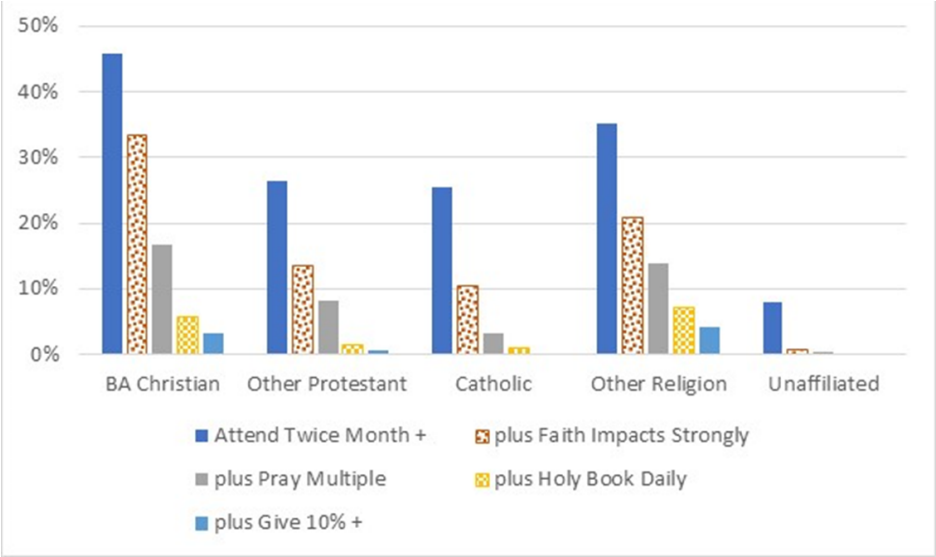


Committed Level of Religious Activity

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.

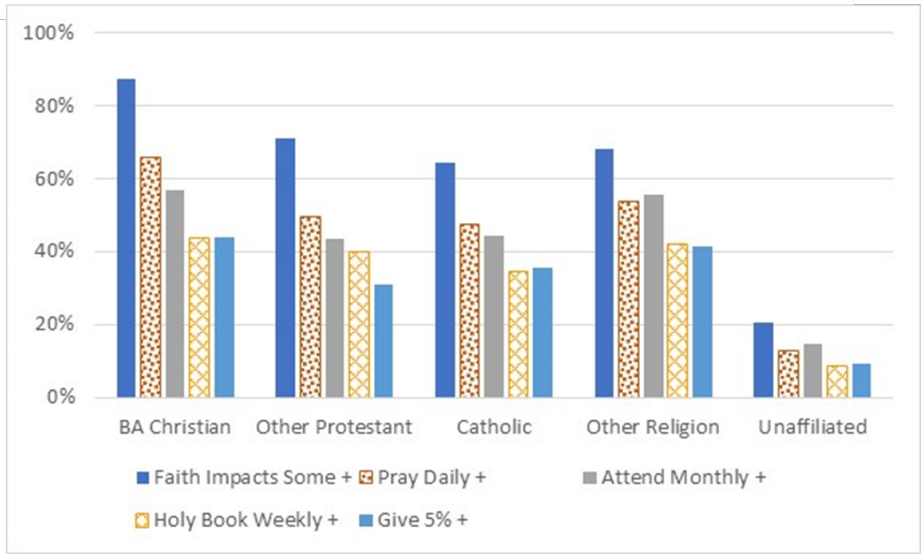
Also note that the entire Unaffiliated group reports less than 8% on each of these practices and less than 1% who claim to do even two of
these practices.

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



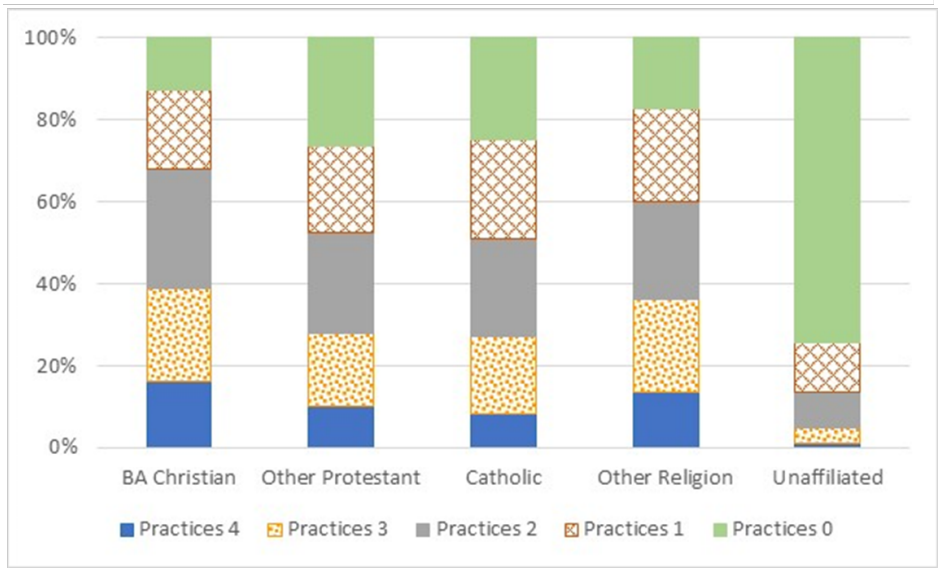
Now let's look at those with at least a Nominal level of religious practice (i.e., those who select the nominal level or the committed
level). As shown in the figure, this is a much lower bar with all religious faiths hovering over 60% on those who agree/strongly agree that their faith has a significant 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.

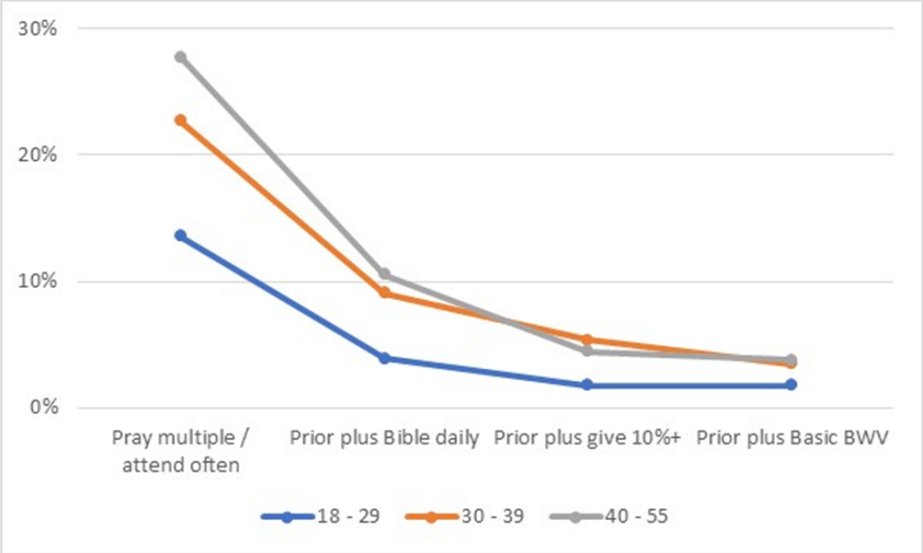
It is worth noting that Other Protestants and Catholics do not lag far behind Born Again Christians in the percentage doing at least three
of the activities. This difference is a significant contrast to the Basic Biblical Worldview questions and the "who is Jesus" questions where these other religious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

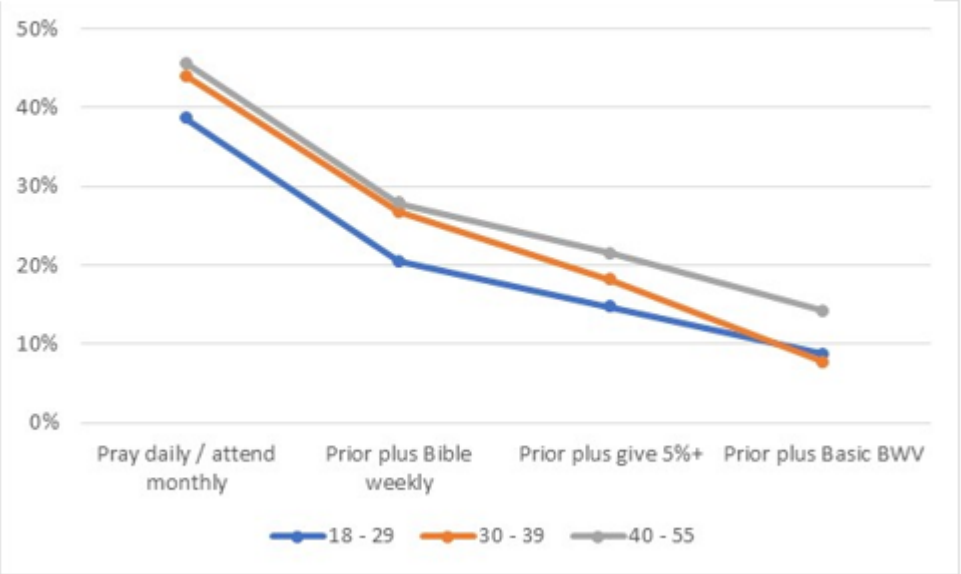
Variations by Age among Born Again Christians

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



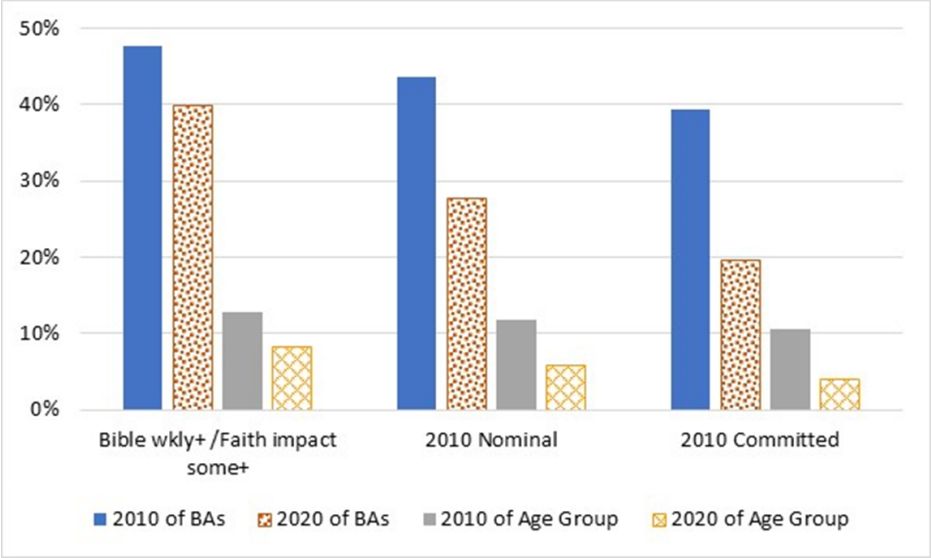
How do these religious activities vary by age among Born Again Christians? The results are plotted in the graph on the right for a
Committed Level of Activity. As shown, the percentage of the youngest adults is significantly less than for the two older groups. However, as the graph moves to the right 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.

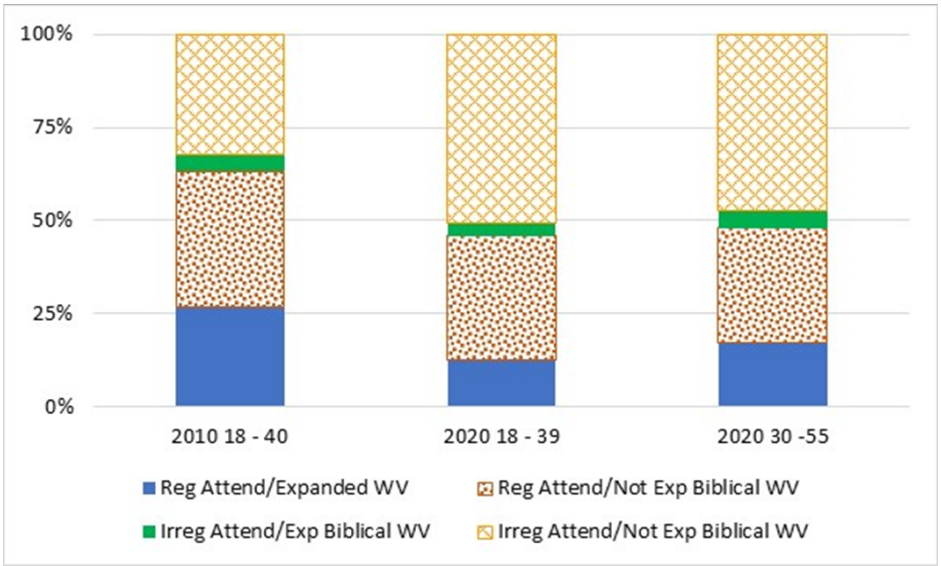
What we see is that the drop-off in the 2010 Nominal category is from 44% to 28% and the drop-off in the 2010 Committed category is down one half from 40% to 20%. These numbers reflect an astounding drop in the importance that Born Again Christians place on these simple religious activities.

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.

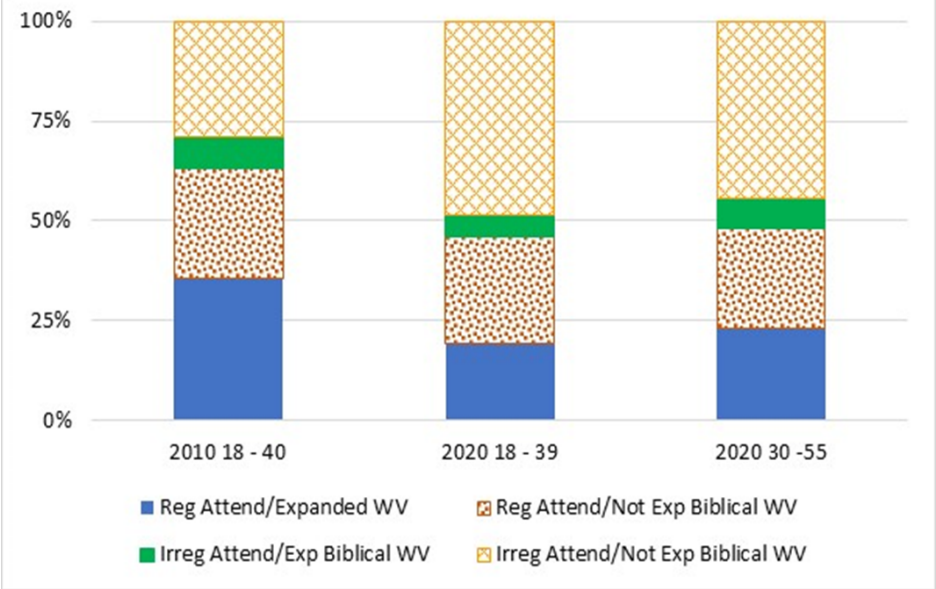
Looking at those with regular attendance and an Expanded Biblical Worldview we see a significant reduction among 18- to 29-year-olds in 2020 (27% down to 13%) with a lesser reduction among 30- to 55-year-olds down to 17%. The percentage of regular attenders without an Expanded Biblical Worldview has 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.

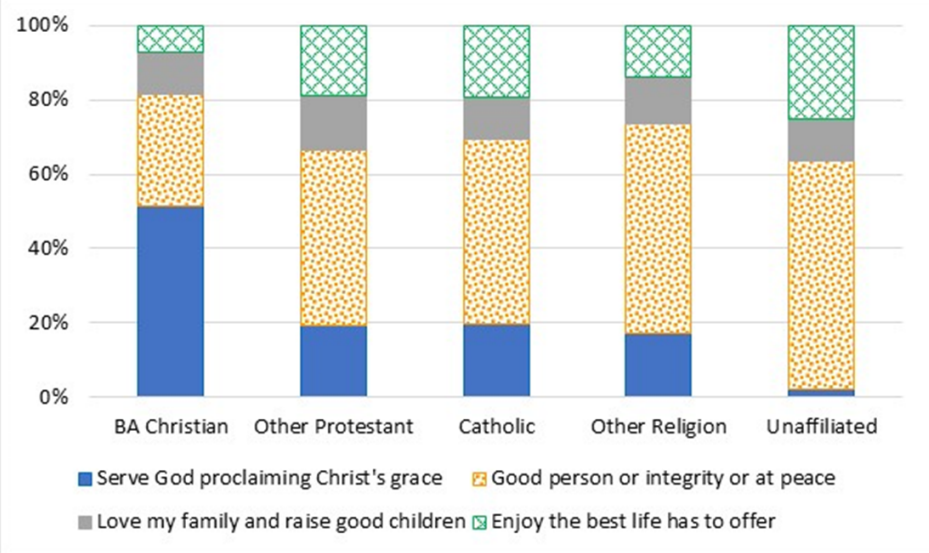
4. To live at peace with all.

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

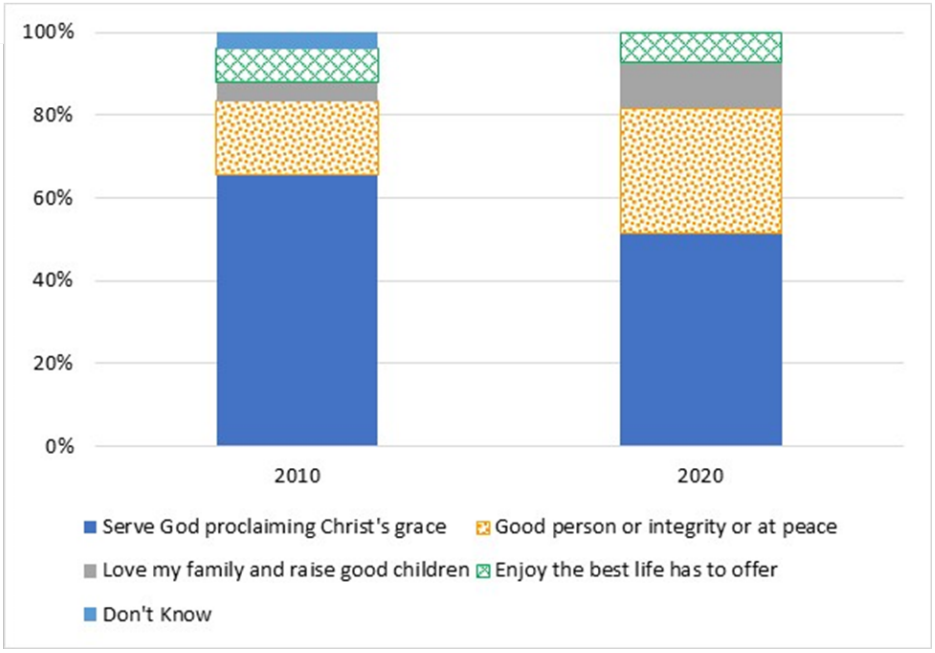


The results are charted in the graph to the left. As shown, just over half of Born Again Christians profess an eternal perspective. This means almost half do not, with most of those selecting a purpose that focuses on good behaviors in their personal life.

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.

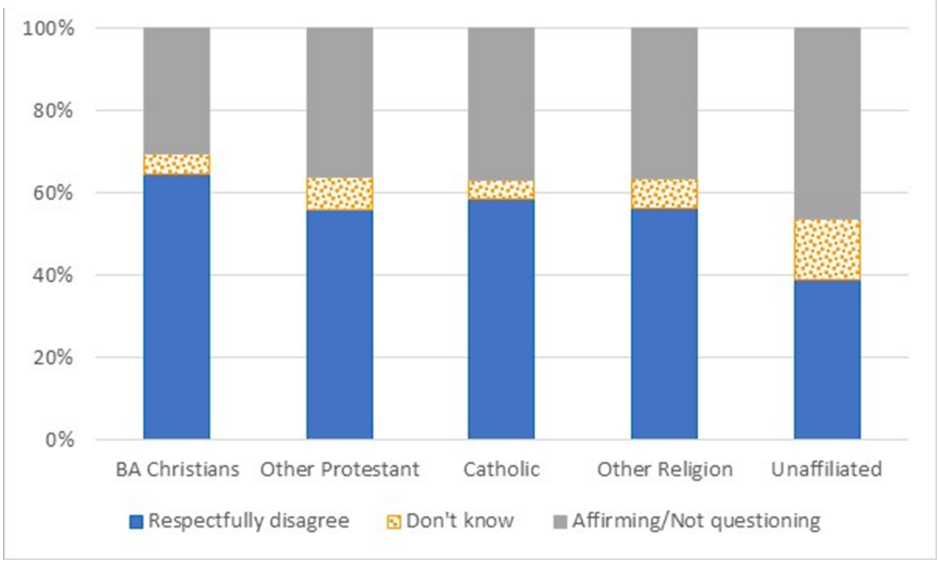
2. Not questioning another person's moral decisions.

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.

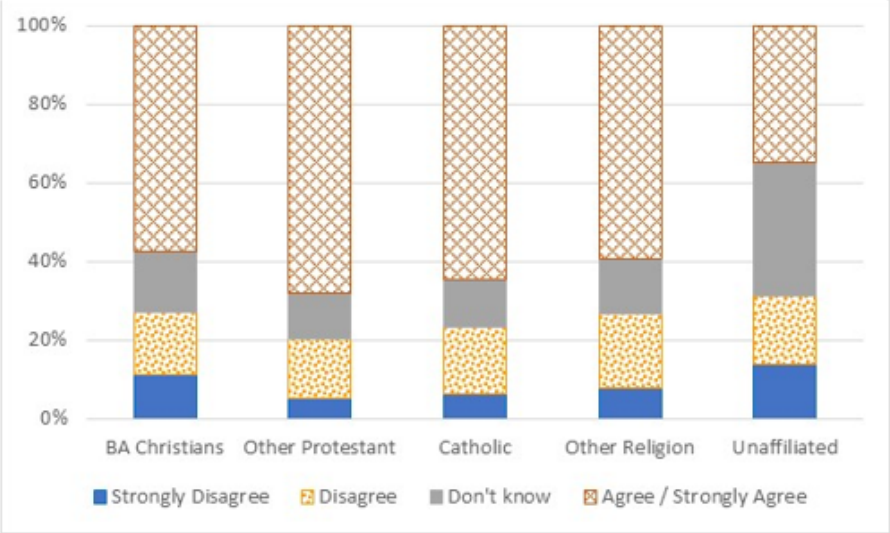
Figure 1 How 18 - 39 Year Old Americans Define Tolerance



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)

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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

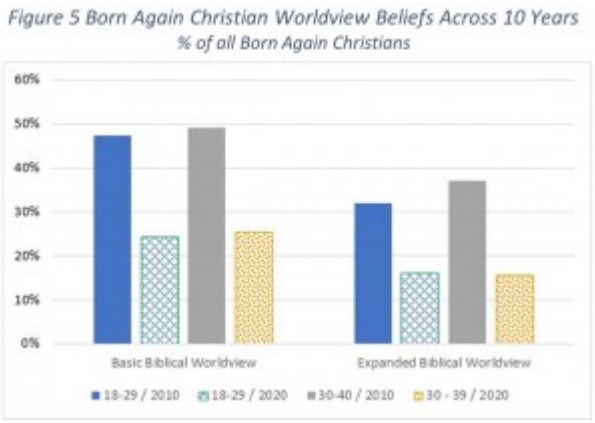
5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**

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.

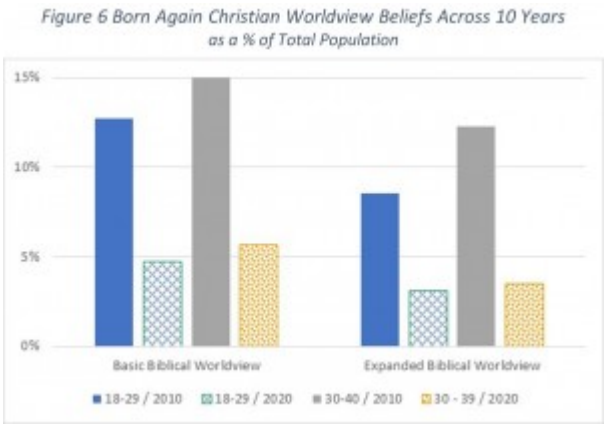
Adding in the questions on Satan and absolutes for an Expanded Biblical Worldview, we see each group drop significantly. The Born Again Christian group runs about 15% below age 40 and 25% (or 1 in 4) from 40 to 55. The other two groups drop from almost none to barely any.



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.

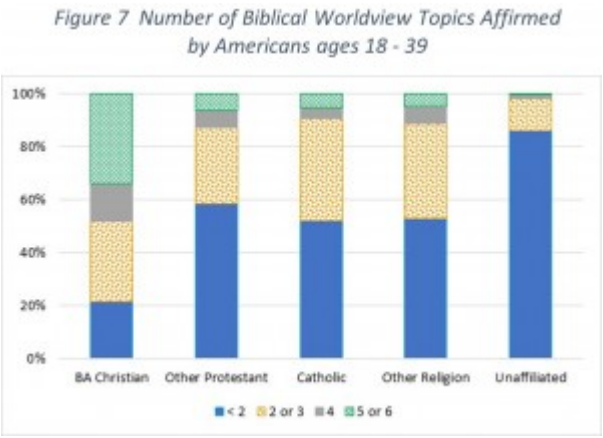


However, because the percent of the population who profess to being born again has dropped over the last ten years as well, the situation is even worse. We need to look at the percent of Americans of a particular age range who hold to a Biblical Worldview. Those results are shown in Figure 6. Once again, 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?



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.

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What is Art, Anyway?

When my dear friend Laura Helms told me about integrating her biblical worldview with how she teaches high school art, I was

fascinated and asked her to write about her approach.



For the last nine years I have had the privilege of teaching visual arts in the public school system here in Texas. Each year I start off with one question on the board: “What is art?” Students give a wide range of answers but they usually land somewhere near the phrase “art can be whatever you want it to be.”

This year I laid out an assortment of objects ranging from pottery to paintings to piles of trash that I pulled from the garbage can that morning. Through many giggles and lots of questions, many of the students still firmly asserted that all of these items could be considered “art.” While you may agree or disagree with the used candy wrapper being called “art,” art is a form of visual communication that encompasses the values and beliefs of the maker. Effective art communicates those beliefs clearly to the viewer. And I believe good art communicates truth to the viewer.

I don’t get upset when my students hold the candy wrapper up as “art.” I don’t get upset because I know why they think that way. Matthew 6:22-23 says, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” My primary goal as an art teacher is to help students learn how to see clearly. The goal is to teach them to look for truth—objective truth rather than subjective truth.

Art history is a reflection of what cultures believe about

truth. The shift in western art movements closely correlates to changes in public value systems. Nietsche famously wrote “God is dead” in the late 1800s. After two world wars, the rise of Nihilism in the West, and the elevation of reactionary self-determination supported by the growing popularity of psychology, artistic thought turned inward for answers to the human experience. Artists looked at a world going up in flames and thought to themselves, *Maybe it is true. Maybe I am on my own and this is all there is to life.* Artists created art in their own image, validating their own truths and personal beliefs. When our eyes do not work, we do not see clearly. It is not shocking, but it is heartbreaking. When we exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25), we hope to find life in things that cannot give us life.

I want to briefly share with you the journey my students take each year. Together we first identify our beliefs. What do you think the definition of art really is? What is the purpose of art? How do you know if art is good art? We start by identifying what we believe about “art.”

Next, we look at how we came to hold those beliefs. Together we look at history, philosophy and the evolution of Western thought. We talk about wars and Darwin, about appropriation and human rights. We look at the change in technology and how it influenced human interaction. We talk about religion and worldviews. We pinpoint large ideological shifts that show up in history. Did you know that the phrase “art is about personal expression” would have been laughed at before 1900? And the phrase “art can be what I want it to be” didn’t show up in public thought until the 1960s. As a class, we look at these origins and take note of how they have shaped our own thoughts and beliefs about art.



Once students can articulate what they believe about art and the origins of those beliefs, we take a second look. How do you know your beliefs are true? How has your understanding of art changed after your studies? Students think they are profound when they make grandiose statements like “art is whatever I want it to be.” The goal isn’t to change their beliefs. The goal is to teach them to see clearly.

I think we all need to go to art class. At our core, none of us want to be fools, trusting in false hopes. We all desire to see truth. It is my goal to help them learn how to seek it and find it. When was the last time you asked yourself, “How do I know this to be true?”

Now go make some good, weird art.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/what-is-art-anyway/
on April 30, 2019.

A Pilgrim’s Progress: Suffering in the Life of John

Bunyan – A Christian View of Suffering

Dr. Michael Gleghorn considers the lessons presented by the life and writings of the famous author of The Pilgrim's Progress *to give each of us a better understanding of the role of suffering in the lives of followers of Christ.*

A Suffering Pilgrim



John Bunyan is known to most people today as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress,* a book he began writing in prison. It tells the story of "Christian," who makes his way from the "City of Destruction" (which represents this world) to the "Celestial City" (which represents Heaven). It's been described as "perhaps the world's best-selling book" (after the Bible), and has been "translated into over 200 languages."{1} Written in the form of an allegory, it essentially relates the story of Bunyan's own Christian journey.{2} And just as *his* life was full of trials and suffering, so also "Christian" must face many hardships and difficulties as well.

Bunyan was born in England in 1628 at a time of great political and religious unrest. In 1644, at just fifteen years old, both his mother and sister died within a month of each other. Later that year, "when Bunyan had turned sixteen, he was drafted into the Parliamentary Army and for about two years was taken from his home for military service."{3} He married in 1648, at about the age of twenty, but his wife died just ten years later, leaving him with four children, the oldest of whom was blind. He married again the following year, in 1659, but incredibly, just one year after this, "Bunyan was arrested and put in prison."{4} His wife, who was pregnant at the time, suffered a miscarriage, probably because of the

added stress which this ordeal created. She was then left to care for Bunyan's four children while he spent the next twelve years in jail.{5}

As you can see, Bunyan was no stranger to suffering. Indeed, he had an intimate, firsthand acquaintance with heartache, trials, and difficulties. But what crimes had he committed to be cast into prison? Essentially, the charges against him were two: first, "he refused to attend the services of the Established church" of England; and second, he "preached to unlawful assemblies."{6} You see, Bunyan had converted to Christianity during his first marriage and had become a powerful and respected preacher. But in the volatile political and religious climate of that day, the freedom of Nonconformist preachers like Bunyan eventually came to an end. And when it did, he was arrested and put in prison.

In the remainder of this article we'll look at some of the trials this man endured, how he responded to them, and what they might teach us as we each make our own spiritual journey.

The Pilgrim's Conversion

The Pilgrim's Progress is one of the best-selling Christian books of all time. But as Bunyan tells us in another of his books, the autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, before becoming a Christian he had few equals in "cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God." Indeed, prior to his marriage, he says he was "the very ring-leader of all the youth . . . into all manner of vice and ungodliness."{7}

Bunyan's young wife had a very godly father. When he died, he left her two books which she brought into her marriage: *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. According to Bunyan, although these books did not awaken him to his "sad and sinful state," they nevertheless did arouse

within him “some desires to religion.”{8} One of the practical effects of these new desires was Bunyan’s regular attendance at a local church.

Soon Bunyan also began to read the Bible. He then came under such powerful conviction of sin that he scarcely knew what to do. “Sin and corruption,” he wrote, “would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. . . I thought none but the devil himself could equalize me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind.”{9} Bunyan was plunged into a state of despair over the greatness of his sin which, he tell us, “continued a long while, even for some years together.”{10}

Eventually, after years of spiritual and emotional agony, Bunyan described “what seemed to be the decisive moment.”{11} He was heading into the field one day when suddenly this sentence broke in upon his mind: “Thy righteousness is in heaven.” At this, he says, “I . . . saw . . . that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse: for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, and today, and for ever* (Heb. 13:8).” “Now,” he said, “did my chains fall off my legs indeed . . . my temptations also fled away . . . now went I . . . home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God.”{12}

After years of spiritual anguish, Bunyan had been set free by the grace of God from some of his worst fears and torments. But as we’ll see, this was not to be the end of his experience with suffering. As one set of trials was ending, another was soon to begin.

The Pilgrim’s Imprisonment

According to Bunyan, five or six years after his conversion, in about the year 1655, some of the believers in his local

congregation began entreating him “to speak a word of exhortation unto them.”{13} Although initially hesitant, Bunyan agreed to their request “and suddenly a great preacher was discovered.”{14} Apparently, word spread quickly through the English countryside. According to one author, “In the days of toleration, a day’s notice would get a crowd of 1,200 to hear him preach at 7 o’clock in the morning on a weekday.”{15}

Unfortunately, it was not to last. In 1660, the same year in which Charles II was brought home as king in the Restoration of the Monarchy, John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned “for preaching without state approval.”{16} Officially, he was charged with being in violation of the Elizabethan Conventicle Act of 1593. According to this Act, anyone found guilty of “abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and . . . being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings . . . could be held without bail until he or she submitted to the authority of the Anglican church.”{17} As a Nonconformist preacher, this Act applied to men like Bunyan.

What’s interesting, however, is that Bunyan could have gone free at any time, so long as he agreed to give up preaching. But as he was firmly persuaded that he had been called by God to this ministry, he was completely unwilling to abandon his calling. He thus spent the next twelve years in prison, largely cut off from his wife, children, friends, and church.

I say “largely cut off” for, strange as it may seem, it appears that Bunyan was occasionally let out “to see his family or make brief trips.”{18} Of course, this was the exception and not the rule. Nevertheless, by “the standards of the seventeenth century the conditions in which he was held were not particularly brutal.”{19} On the other hand, Bunyan was largely fortunate in this respect: “hundreds of Dissenters died in prison, and many more came out with their health broken by foul, over-crowded conditions.”{20}

Although these qualifications must be admitted, we must never

lose sight of the fact that Bunyan was willing to endure twelve long years of this suffering, rather than agree to give up preaching. And thankfully, as we'll see, God brought a great deal of good out of His faithful servant's suffering.

The Pilgrim's Writings

Most people today know John Bunyan as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but this is just one of many works written by the metal-worker turned minister. His first book was written in 1656, when he was twenty-eight years old. But by the time of his death, some thirty-two years later, he had authored fifty-seven more![{21}] John Piper notes:

> *The variety in these books was remarkable: books dealing with controversies (like those concerning the Quakers . . . justification and baptism), collections of poems, children's literature, and allegory (like The Holy War and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman). But the vast majority were practical . . . expositions of Scripture built from sermons for the sake of . . . helping Christian pilgrims make their way successfully to heaven.[{22}]*

What's especially astonishing about the size and variety of Bunyan's literary legacy is that it came from a man with almost no formal education. As a child Bunyan had been taught to read and write, but nothing more. He had no university or seminary degrees in which to boast. And yet his diligent study of the Bible, born mainly out of a burning desire to find peace with God, made Bunyan mighty in the Scriptures. Indeed the Bible, more than any other book, would be the primary influence upon his many writings. So evident was this to Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth century Baptist preacher, that he once wrote of Bunyan:

> *He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and though his writings*

> *are . . . full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.*{23}

Not even his suffering in prison could dampen Bunyan's enthusiasm for the Word of God or for writing. Indeed, if anything, it increased it. Some of his best-known works were written from the confines of a prison cell. These include *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, written during his first imprisonment, as well as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, apparently completed during a second, briefer period of imprisonment in 1677.{24} Bunyan's writings are surely one of his greatest gifts to the church.

Lessons from a Suffering Pilgrim

A thoughtful examination of John Bunyan's reflections on the purpose and value of suffering can give us much wisdom in how best to deal with it in our own lives. Near the end of his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he appended a brief account of his imprisonment in the Bedford jail. In it, he tells of how he tried to prepare himself for imprisonment, and possibly even death, when he realized that he might soon be called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ. Naturally, as one might well expect, one of the things he did was pray. He was particularly concerned to ask God for the strength to patiently endure his imprisonment, even with an attitude of joy (Col. 1:11).{25}

However, it's the second thing he says that I find especially interesting and helpful. He reflects on the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:9: "[W]e had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (NASB). Commenting

on this verse, he then makes the following two observations:

> *By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. . . . The second was, to live upon God that is invisible; as Paul said in another place, the way not to faint, is to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen, they are eternal{26}.*

Bunyan realized that, like it or not, suffering, pain, loss and death would all come to him in one way or another. Indeed, sooner or later every single one of us must ultimately face these terrifying realities. How, then, can we best prepare to meet them? As Bunyan reminds us, if we only prepare for prison, say, then we will be unprepared for beatings. But if we stop our preparation with beatings, then we will be unprepared for death. But we cannot evade or cheat death forever. And thus, concludes Bunyan, "the best way to go through sufferings, is to trust in God through Christ, as touching the world to come; and as touching this world."{27} This was how Bunyan lived, and with God's help it was also how he died. May the eternal and unseen God grant each of us the grace to follow his example.

Notes

1. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 375, cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 60.
2. W. R. Owens, "Introduction," in *Grace Abounding to the*

Chief of Sinners (New York: Penguin, 1987), xxiii.
3. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 49.
4. Ibid., 54.
5. Ibid.
6. Owens, "Introduction," xv.
7. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (New York: Penguin, 1987), 8.
8. Ibid., 10.
9. Ibid., 24.
10. Ibid.
11. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 52.
12. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 59.
13. Ibid., 67-68.
14. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 53.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 47.
17. Owens, "Notes," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 127, n. 137.
18. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 48.
19. Owens, "Introduction," xvi.
20. Ibid.
21. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 60.
22. Ibid., 60-61.
23. Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 159; cited in Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 77.
24. Owens, "Introduction," xvi-xvii.
25. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 79.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

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Probe Responses to "The Shack"

Probe staff members are not unanimous in their responses to *The Shack*. Sue Bohlin enjoyed it as "a good book with problems," and former staffer Pat Zukeran sees value in the book but is concerned enough about the theological problems to give it a "thumbs down." Those of us who have read the book have a difference of opinion with each other, but we remain friendly and mutually respectful even as we disagree.

The movie is faithful enough to the book that our takeaways still stand.

	Sue Bohlin's Response to *The Shack*
	Patrick Zukeran's Critique of *The Shack*

Originally published in 2008.

What is Probe?

Probe Ministries is a non-profit ministry whose mission is to assist the church in renewing the minds of believers with a Christian worldview and to equip the church to engage the world for Christ. Probe fulfills this mission through our Mind Games conferences for youth and adults, our 3-minute daily radio program, and our extensive Web site at www.probe.org.

Further information about Probe's materials and ministry may be obtained by contacting us at:

Probe Ministries

Suite 2000
2001 W. Plano Parkway
Plano, TX 75075
(972) 941-4565
info@probe.org
www.probe.org
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Japan's Unknown Christian History: A Review of 'Silence'

Former Probe staffer Dr. Patrick Zukeran reviews Silence, *the book by Shusaku Endo and the movie directed by Martin Scorsese, which look at the little-known Christian history of Japan.*

Introduction: Historical Background

The novel *Silence,* written by Shusaku Endo, has been made into a movie directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Liam Neeson and Andrew Garfield. This historical fiction provides a glimpse into the little known Christian history of Japan. Few are aware that Japan has a rich Christian history that dates back over four centuries.

The first Christian missionary from Europe was Francis Xavier,

who arrived in Japan in 1549. The Japanese embraced the message of Christ and for half a century Christianity flourished in Japan. By 1587, it is estimated that there were nearly 200,000 Christians in Japan. In 1597, it is estimated that approximately 300,000 Japanese had become Christian, 1.6% of the population.{1}

The situation changed dramatically in 1587 under the rule of the Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He grew concerned about the growing influence of Christianity and viewed it as a threat to his power. He gave an edict outlawing Christianity in Japan. In 1597 the first 26 Christians were arrested in Kyoto and marched 600 miles to Nagasaki, the center of Christianity in Japan. There they were tortured and later crucified. This began the Christian persecution in Japan.

Following Hideyoshi came the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867), which lasted over 250 years. Under the Tokugawa rule one of the fiercest Christian persecutions occurred in Church history. Church historians estimate that between 300,000 and 500,000 Christians died during this time.

The Tokugawa Shoguns realized that killing the Christians did not diminish the growth of Christianity in Japan. The Shogun eventually devised a more sinister and effective way of thwarting the spread of Christianity. Instead of quickly executing Christians, it was more effective to torture the Christians and coerce them to renounce their faith. After committing apostasy, the apostate would be paraded throughout Japan and have them persuade fellow Christians to abandon their faith. This proved more effective in discouraging people from becoming Christians. Christians who apostatized were known as “korobi” or fallen Christians. Priests who apostatized were the most valuable in this endeavor.

To induce Christians to renounce their faith, the Shogun devised some of the most heinous forms of torture that he

unleashed on the Christians. Christian men, women, and children were slowly burned at the stake, boiled in hot springs, thrown into frozen lakes and brutalized in various ways. One of the most feared methods was the pit. In this technique, people were hung upside down and their head was placed in a covered pit filled with sewage. The torturers would cut a slit behind the ears or across the forehead so the blood rush would not kill the person but prolong the agony for days.

The persecution proved to be very effective. In 1612 there were an estimated 300,000 Christians. In 1625 it is estimated that there were less than half that number. For the next 250 years the Japanese Christians were forced to worship secretly and were known as the “kakure” or hidden Christians.

This is the historical setting for the movie *Silence* which takes place in 1639 during the height of the Christian persecution in Japan. Two Jesuit priests from Portugal, Father Sebastião Rodrigues and Father Francisco Garrpe, secretly enter Japan in search of their mentor Father Cristóvão Ferreira (Neeson) who is purported to have apostatized. Their goal is to find Ferreira and minister to the Japanese Christians who are without priests and thus without true spiritual guidance.

The priests arrive in Japan to find that the Christians live a very arduous life. The movie does an excellent job in revealing the poverty of the Christian communities who are forced to retreat to remote areas. The audience also feels the anxiety and fear that constantly looms over the Christian villages. The priests spend their days in hiding and in the evenings they minister to the community. However, the priests are discovered and eventually captured.

Silence vividly portrays graphically the brutal torture the Japanese Christians suffered at the hands of the daimyos. There are heart-wrenching scenes that depict the way fathers,

mothers, and children were inhumanely tortured before they were executed. In many church history books we read of the glorious death of the Christian martyrs. However, this is not the case in the novel or the movie. In the book *Silence,* Susaku Endo wrote,

> I had long read about the martyrdom in the lives of the saints – how the souls of the martyrs had gone home to Heaven, how they had been filled with glory in Paradise, how the angels had blown trumpets. This was the splendid martyrdom I had often seen in my dreams. But the martyrdom of the Japanese Christians I now describe to you was no such glorious thing. What a miserable and painful business it was.{2}

Indeed, the horror of martyrdom is captured in the movie. The agonizing deaths of the Christians are not inspiring or glorious but dreadful to watch.

The priests are coerced to apostatize while in prison. The priests do not fear their own death but they cannot bear to watch the suffering of others. Father Garrpe dies attempting to rescue Christians tossed into the ocean. Rodrigues is now the last missionary in Japan. Finally, the dreaded but sought-for meeting occurs. He meets his mentor Father Ferreira who has apostatized and now goes by his Japanese name Sawano Chuan. He is married and spends his days translating European writings for the Japanese and persuading Christians to abandon their faith in Christ. He encourages Rodrigues to save his life and his fellow believers by apostatizing. Rodrigues refuses and expresses his heartfelt disappointment at Ferreira. Rodrigues courageously resists but eventually he is unable to endure the suffering of his fellow Christians hanging in the pit. Worn down by the cruelty, he eventually steps on the portrait of Jesus, renouncing his faith in Christ. Knowing the Catholic Church cannot forgive him, Rodrigues wonders if Jesus will forgive him for what he has done. This becomes his agonizing struggle for the rest of

his life.

The Silence of God

The main question that is asked throughout the movie is, Where is God? How can He let His people suffer and die like this? Why does He remain silent and not answer the cries of His people? The priests Garrpe and Rodrigues wrestle with that question throughout the movie and we are drawn into their struggle. This is the question people in every age ask in the midst of their suffering.

Each year I lead the Japan Christian Martyrs Tour where I take the group along the path of the Martyrs. We see the sites and hear the stories where thousands of Japanese Christians were brutally tortured and executed. At those times, even four centuries later, we still ask, “Where was God? Why was He silent? How could He allow the violent massacre of His people in Japan?”

In the final moments of the movie, Rodrigues, now known as the Apostate Paul wrestles with God on this lifelong struggle. He reflects on his act of apostasy, stepping on the image of Christ but instead of anger in the eyes of Christ, he saw eyes of understanding, grace and love. He states,

> Even now that face is looking at me with eyes of pity from the plaque rubbed by many feet. “Trample!” said those compassionate eyes. “Trample! Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on this plaque. But that pain alone is enough. I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason I am here.”

“Lord, I resented your silence,” states Rodrigues. Jesus replies, “I was not silent. I suffered beside you.”

Despite his act of apostasy, Rodrigues in the end finds forgiveness from a Christ who understands his situation and extends grace to him. He realizes Christ was not silent

but with him though his suffering and remained with him even in his final days. He seems to realize the love of Christ is more powerful and faithful than he has ever known.

This is one of the unique aspects of *Silence*. Endo and Scorsese want us to see through the eyes of the "korobe" Christian. We applaud those who died never renouncing their faith in Christ and quickly condemn those who publicly renounced their faith in Christ. However, I believe Shusaku Endo through his novel tells us, "Not so fast!"

Those who apostatized struggled and suffered greatly too. I believe Endo wants us to see through the eyes of Rodrigues and ask ourselves the question, "Could we endure watching our wives, children and loved ones receiving such vicious treatment for days without end?" "Would we remain steadfast or would we renounce Christ to save our loved ones from such an unbearable fate?" "Would Christ condemn us for renouncing Him to save our loved ones or would he understand and extend grace in such a situation as the Japanese and other persecuted Christian face?"

I believe Endo wants us to understand the struggle of persecuted Christians and wants us to understand they wrestle with their guilt for the rest of their lives. If God's grace is indeed "greater than all my sin," should we consider extending grace to our "fallen brethren" as well?

I believe another lesson Endo wants us to learn is that God is not silent but remains with His people in their suffering, never abandoning His people. Throughout church history, Christians have faced brutal persecutions. Even Christ the Son of God suffered the most dreadful death on the cross. Therefore, God understands the pain we experience, He grieves at the wickedness of men, and He promises to be with us always.

I agree with Endo that God is with us in our suffering.

However, I feel his answer is incomplete. In a Christian's suffering, often a disciple feels the presence of Christ in an even greater way. In the writings of the persecuted saints and in the many interviews I have had with Christians who are suffering, many state they feel the presence of God in greater ways than they have ever known. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 3:10-11, ". . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." So many times in suffering Christians identify with the sufferings of Christ and sense His presence in greater ways.

What I found troubling about the novel and movie is the gloomy mood of the story. The movie emphasizes the brutal deaths of Christians, the struggles of a fallen priest, and what appears to be the demise and bleak future of Christianity in Japan. Indeed, the Christian history of Japan is sorrowful and the movie ends in the midst of Japan's persecution so I can understand Endo's ending. On this earth, life will not always have a happy ending. What I find missing in Endo's story is the message of hope that is found in Christ even in suffering. What compels Christians to surrender their life for Christ is the assured hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:2 states, ". . . looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

There is little joy when focusing primarily on the affairs and outcomes in this fallen world. If this is where the story ends, it is indeed dark and disheartening. However, through the darkness shines the hope that allowed Christ to have joy even when facing the agony of the cross. Believers can also have joy and hope if they look forward to the glory that awaits every believer in Christ. Despite the suffering believers face, it pales in comparison to the eternal glory

that is to come. Persecution teaches Christians we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. Christians can endure and remain joyful even in their suffering when focused on Christ and the glory of our true home. The end is not the cross of death, but the resurrection of Jesus and every disciple of Christ. This is important in any story of persecuted Christians. It is emphasized in the New Testament and is the story of Christ's and the believer's ultimate triumph. The New Testament prophesies the future persecution of all believers but ends with the triumphant resurrection and return of Christ. Through Christ's victory, the Christian story ends ultimately in triumph. The end is not the death of the Christians in Japan but the glory they received from Christ in heaven. Their courageous commitment should be an inspiration to believers around the world and an example of what it means to live not for this world, but the kingdom of heaven. Hebrews 11:35-40 states,

> Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The Japanese Christians were living for another kingdom and looking forward to the eternal glory of heaven. This message was not present in the novel or the film, which I believe made it a dark and gloomy story. Although Japan Christian history is discouraging, the end has not been written for the Christ's Church in Japan.

Can A Tree Grow in a Swamp?

One of the most significant dialogues in the movie occurs between Rodrigues and the Samurai Lord Inoue, also known as the Inquisitor. Inoue states,

> A tree which flourishes in one kind of soil, may wither if the soil is changed. As for the tree of Christianity, in a foreign country its leaves may grow thick and the buds may be rich, while in Japan the leaves wither and no bud appears. Father, have you never thought of the difference in the soil, the difference in the water?

Inoue tells Rodrigues that a tree cannot grow in a swamp. Therefore, Christianity will not take root in Japan.

There is a famous saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." In other words, persecution strengthens the faith of Christians and the church grows when persecuted. This was not the case in Japan. The genocide that took place from 1600-1800 was devastating and Christianity has never regained a strong foothold in Japan. Another question Christians struggle with is, "Why has Christianity not taken root in Japan?" Today the largest growth of Christianity is occurring throughout Asia. Despite this, Christianity continues to struggle in Japan.

When Christianity first arrived in Japan in 1549, the Japanese embraced the gospel of Christ. Xavier was so impressed with Japan that he called for only the missionaries of highest quality to be sent.{3} Xavier wrote, "Japan is the only country yet discovered in these regions where there is hope of Christianity permanently taking root. . . . These are the best people so far discovered, and it seems to me that among the unbelievers, no people can be found to excel them."{4} Father Organto, who followed Xavier, wrote that Japan would be Christianized in 30 years, expressing the optimism of missionaries that Christianity would thrive

in Japan.{5} The situation quickly changed and the two centuries of persecution that followed nearly eradicated Christianity in Japan.

Today there is a famous saying among missionaries: “Japan is where Christian missionaries go to die.” Indeed, many return after years of labor discouraged and disillusioned by the little fruit they see in their years of labor in Japan. There are many reasons given why the gospel has not thrived in this country. Can the seed of the gospel penetrate the hard soil of Japanese culture?

As unbelievable as this may seem, I believe a spiritual revival for Japan. As the gospel flourished 400 years ago, spiritual awakening will come to this nation again. How it will come about only God knows. I believe the Japanese are realizing the emptiness of their secular outlook and lifestyle of materialism and consumerism. Their high suicide rate reflects the emptiness of these ideologies. Japanese Buddhism and Shinto fail to answer the great questions of life or fill the void in the heart of all people. These religions are also largely built on myths and so they are not based on reality.

Xavier realized the Japanese religions did not answer the big questions of life such as the origin of life and the universe, the nature of God, the origin of evil, the answer to the problem of evil, and what happens after death.{6} The ideologies that dominate Japan still fail to adequately answer these questions today. As Xavier demonstrated that Christianity provides the best answer to these questions, so the Church in Japan must do the same. Christianity has the evidence to uphold its claims to truth and life everlasting in Jesus. I believe that Christian apologetics would do well in this country that is very rational and well educated. The message of the gospel provides the true message of hope for this nation. I hope that the message and lives of the Japan Christian martyrs will one day be recognized and remembered by the people of Japan.

Conclusion

Scorsese's film is one of the few films about the little known Christian history of Japan. Even the Japanese are not aware of the tremendous Christian history of their nation. We should be thankful to Scorsese for showing the brutal persecution and the suffering endured by the Christians of Japan. Endo and Scorsese reveal to us the heinous tortures but they also take us into the mental torture that those suffering persecution go through. The struggles of the priests and the questions they ask are the same questions we all struggle with in our journey of faith. Endo and Scorsese present a unique perspective looking through the eyes of one who apostatizes and yet finds God's grace through it all.

It is my hope that Christians throughout the world gain a greater awareness of one of the greatest massacre of Christians that took place in Church history. I also hope that people will appreciate and admire the courage and commitment of the Japanese Christians who gave their lives for Christ. The Japanese unfortunately hide this part of their history. However, the Japanese and the world should recognize this facet of their history. The story of the men, women and children who gave their lives for Christ is moving and inspirational. They truly lived out the call of discipleship as Jesus commanded. In Matthew 10:37-39 Jesus said,

> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Few have lived out the commands of Christ so faithfully and courageously as the Christians of Japan. I hope that more will recognize and remember the Christians of Japan who gave their lives for the Gospel.

Notes

1. Keith Webb, *Overcoming Spiritual Barriers in Japan*, (Nextchurch Resources, 2010), 15.
2. Shusaku Endo, *Silence* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969), 60.
3. John Dougill, *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 34.
4. Webb, 15.
5. Dougill, 51.
6. Henry Coleridge, *The Life and Letters of Francis Xavier* (London: Burns and Oates, 1881), 572.

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Addendum 1/3/2022:

We received this inquiry to our website:

I was fascinated by this article on your site https://probe.org/japans-unknown-christian-history-a-review-of-silence/ about unspeakable torture that rulers of Japan did. But it is said there is many reasons why Japanese people do not come to Christ in large numbers. So what are these reasons? Help me to understand, please. Also, I believe that the tortures that rulers of Japan performed could only take place because God granted them freedom, and there should be sufficient moral reason why He permitted it. It is known that the blood of martyrs brings salvation to the land; maybe we just need to wait more and we'll see how their sacrifice will bring God's grace and Christ' salvation to people of Japan, especially now in the era of info technology.

Dr. Pat Zukeran, now leading his ministry Evidence and Answers from his Hawaii home, responded:

Aloha,

Thank you for reading the article on the movie *Silence* and your questions.

First, we do not know why God allows evil and suffering on some people and nations. God is in control of all things and has a plan for all that happens. Sometimes, only He knows the reason for the suffering of the Japanese Christians.

Today, less than 1% of Japanese are Christian. There are numerous reasons the nation of Japan is resistant to the Gospel message but no one really knows for sure. Here are some factors that contribute to their resistance to Christ.

First, the Japanese culture is a "group think" culture. Before a person makes a decision, he or she must consider how it will affect the family, clan and ancestors. Often they must consider how it affects their business partners, friends, etc…. The group pressure is very high in Japan.

Second, Japan is a very materialistic culture and it places little importance on the spiritual life. As a result, there really is no Sabbath day or rest. Most people from students to business people work 6 to 7 days a week. This makes time for church or Bible study very difficult.

Third, Christianity is seen as a western religion. The Christian history of Japan is not usually portrayed in a positive way.

Fourth, the concept of sin is unclear in Japanese thinking. There is no accurate word for sin. The term used now, *shimi*, actually means "criminal." They view human nature as good and most would not see themselves as criminal. So it is hard to receive the gospel if you do not understand sin and the need for a savior.

Ultimately, there is a dark spiritual stronghold on Japan. We hope one day, a spiritual awakening will occur in that land.

Thank you for your question, I hope this was helpful.

Blessings,

Patrick Zukeran
Evidence and Answers

C.S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explains how a series of radio talks during WWII became one of Christianity's most cherished classics.

One can rarely predict all the consequences which will follow a particular decision. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, France and Britain declared war on Germany. World War II was officially underway. Back in England, C. S. Lewis was "appalled" to find his country once again at war with Germany. Nevertheless, he believed it was "a righteous war" and was determined to do his part "to assist the war effort."{1}



At this point in his life, Lewis was already a fairly successful Oxford don. "His academic works and lively lectures attracted a large student following."{2} Although he published a number of academic studies, Lewis also enjoyed writing popular literary, theological and apologetic works. In 1938 he published the first volume of his science-fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*. And in 1939, as the war began, he was working on *The Problem of Pain*, a thought-provoking discussion of the problem of evil and suffering.{3}

It was this latter work which attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC. Welch and his assistant, Eric Fenn, were both committed Christians who firmly believed that Christianity had something vital to say to the men and women of England as they faced the horrors and challenges of war. According to Welch:

> In a time of uncertainty and questioning it is the responsibility of the Church – and of religious broadcasting as one of its most powerful voices – to declare the truth about God and His relation to men. It has to expound the Christian faith in terms that can be easily understood by ordinary men and women, and to examine the ways in which that faith can be applied to present-day society during these difficult times.{4}

After reading *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis, Welch believed that he had found someone who just might meet his exemplary standards of religious broadcasting. He wrote to Lewis at Oxford University in February 1941, and asked if he might consider putting together a series of broadcast talks for the BBC.{5} Lewis responded a couple days later, accepting the invitation and indicating a desire to speak about what he termed "the law of nature," or what we might call "objective right and wrong."{6} Although Lewis could hardly have known it at the time, this first series of talks would eventually become Book I in his bestselling work of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.

Right and Wrong

Mere Christianity originated as a series of talks entitled *Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.* Lewis pitched his idea to James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, in the following terms:

> It seems to me that the New Testament, by preaching repentance and forgiveness, always *assumes* an audience who already believe in the law of nature and know they have disobeyed it. In modern England we cannot at present assume this, and therefore most apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt. Hence if I gave a series of talks, I shd [*sic*] mention Christianity only at the end, and would prefer not to unmask my battery till then.{7}

In certain respects, this was a rather difficult time to be involved in religious broadcasting. Most of the talks were not pre-recorded, but were given live. And because of the war, the British government was anxious to insure that no information that might be "damaging to morale or helpful to the enemy" end up in a broadcast.{8} As Eric Fenn, the BBC's Assistant Director of Religion, who worked closely with Lewis in the editing and production of his talks, later recalled, ". . . every script had to be submitted to the censor and could not be broadcast until it bore his stamp and signature. And thereafter, only that script—nothing more or less—could be broadcast on that occasion."{9}

Lewis not only had to contend with these difficulties, however, he also had to learn (as anyone who writes for radio must) that this is a very precise business. Since "a listener cannot turn back the page to grasp at the second attempt what was not understood at the first reading," the content must be readily accessible for most of one's listening audience.{10} Additionally, the talks must fit within a narrowly defined window of time. In Lewis's case, this was fifteen minutes per talk – no more, no less. As one might well imagine, Lewis initially found it rather difficult to write under such constraints.{11}

Eventually, however, the combination of Fenn's coaching and Lewis's natural giftedness as a writer and communicator paid off. The talks were completed and successfully delivered. The

BBC was pleased with its new broadcasting talent and quickly enlisted Lewis for a second series of talks.{12}

What Christians Believe

This second series would be titled *What Christians Believe.* Since these talks would require Lewis to more directly communicate some of the core truths of the Christian faith, he sent "the original script to four clergymen in the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches for their critique."{13} Although Lewis was a brilliant and well-read individual, he was nonetheless a layman with no formal training in theology. Since his desire was to communicate the central truth-claims of Christianity, and not just the distinctive beliefs of a particular denomination, he wanted to be sure that his talks were acceptable to a variety of Christian leaders. Although a couple of them had some minor quibbles with certain things that Lewis had said, or not said, they were basically all in agreement. This was important to Lewis, who later tells us, "I was not writing to expound something I could call 'my religion,' but to expound 'mere' Christianity, which is what it is and was what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not."{14}

The BBC was elated with this second series of talks, liking them even more than the first. According to Justin Phillips, who wrote a book on the subject, it was this second series of talks which most closely fulfilled James Welch's original vision as Director of Religion for the BBC "to make the gospel relevant to a people at war. It speaks of the core doctrines of Christianity and explains them in plain English to the general listener."{15}

Eric Fenn, who helped with the editing and production of the talks, wrote appreciatively to Lewis afterwards to tell him he thought they were excellent. He then asked if Lewis might consider doing yet another, even longer, series sometime in

the near future.{16} Lewis would agree to the request, but he was beginning to get a little disenchanted with some of the unanticipated consequences of his success. Already a very busy man, with a variety of teaching, writing, and administrative responsibilities, Lewis now found himself, in addition to everything else he was doing, nearly overwhelmed by the avalanche of mail he was receiving from many of his listeners. This Oxford don was clearly making a powerful connection with his audience!

Why Was Lewis So Popular?

According to Justin Phillips, "Even though Lewis was a prolific correspondent himself, even by his standards it was all becoming a bit too much to cope with."{17} Indeed, were it not for the able secretarial support of his brother Warnie, Lewis may *not* have been able to keep up with it all.

Jill Freud, one of the children evacuated from London at the start of the war, lived with the Lewises for a while. She recalled just how much help Warnie offered his brother, whom they called "Jack":

> He did all his typing and dealt with all his correspondence which was considerable – so huge it was becoming a problem. There was so much of it from the books and then the broadcast talks. And he was so meticulous about it. Jack wrote to everybody and answered every letter.{18}

Indeed, Warnie later estimated that he had pounded out at least 12,000 letters on his brother's behalf!{19} So what made Lewis so popular? What enabled him to connect so well with his readers and listeners?

In the first place, Lewis was simply a very talented writer and thinker. When it came to communicating with a broad, general audience, Lewis brought a lot to the table right from the start. But according to Phillips, the BBC should also be

given some credit for the success of the broadcast talks. He writes, “The attention given to Lewis’s scripts by his producers in religious broadcasting made him a better writer.”{20}

Ironically, even Lewis’s rather volatile domestic situation may have contributed to his success. Lewis was then living with his brother, who had a drinking problem, a child evacuee from London, and the adoring, but also dominating, mother of a friend who had been killed in World War I. Phillips notes:

> All this helped to ‘earth’ Lewis’s writings in the real world. . . . It took him out of the seclusion of the Oxford don . . . and gave him a real home life more like that of his listeners than many of his professional colleagues.{21}

Finally, Lewis combined all of this with a rather disarming humility in his presentations. He wasn’t pretending to be better than others; he was only trying to help. And his listeners responded in droves.

The Impact of the Broadcasts

The BBC eventually got a total of four series of talks out of Lewis. Each of the series was so successful that the BBC continued, for quite some time, to entreat Lewis to do more. But according to Phillips, Lewis was becoming increasingly disillusioned with broadcasting. The BBC issued one invitation after another, but nearly eighteen months after his fourth series concluded Lewis had turned down every single one of them.{22} Although he would eventually be tempted back to the microphone a few more times, the days of his broadcast talks were now a thing of the past. While he was glad to be of service in this way during the war, Lewis never really seemed to care that much for radio. Indeed, in one of his less serious moods, he even blamed the radio “for driving away the leprechauns from Ireland!”{23}

In spite of this, however, the impact of the broadcasts has been immense. Since first being aired on the BBC, these talks have generated (and continue to generate) a great deal of interest and discussion. *Mere Christianity*, a compilation of the talks in book form, continues to show up on bestseller lists even today.{24} And Phillips, speaking of the cumulative impact of *all* of Lewis's writings, observes that while numbers vary, "in the year 2000 some estimates put worldwide sales of Lewis's books at over 200 million copies in more than thirty languages."{25}

As the origin of *Mere Christianity* shows, however, we cannot often predict how it may please God to use (and perhaps greatly multiply) our small, seemingly insignificant, investments in the work of His kingdom. Lewis was simply trying to do his part to be faithful to God and to help his countrymen through the horrors of World War II. But God took his humble offering and, like the story of the loaves and fish recounted in the Gospels, multiplied it far beyond anything Lewis could ever have reasonably imagined.

This should be an encouragement to us. As we faithfully exercise our gifts and abilities in the service of Jesus Christ, small and inconsiderable though they may seem to be, we may one day wake to find that incredibly, and against all odds, God has graciously multiplied our efforts to accomplish truly extraordinary things!

Notes

1. Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic* Mere Christianity (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 4.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. James Welch, *BBC Handbook 1942*, 59; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 78.

5. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 80-81.
6. Ibid., 82.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 33.
9. Interview with Eric Fenn by Frank Gillard for the BBC Oral History Archive, 4 July 1986; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 33.
10. Ibid., 88.
11. Ibid., 87-88.
12. Ibid., 134-35.
13. Ibid., 142.
14. C. S. Lewis, "Preface," in *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960), vii.
15. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 153.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 155.
18. Interview with Jill Freud, 19 November 1999; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 157.
19. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (London: Harper Collins, 1966), 33; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 158.
20. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 165.
21. Ibid., 183.
22. Ibid., 268.
23. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 276.
24. See, for example, www.bookvideoawards.com/bookstandard/images/BestSellersAwards_Program.pdf and peopleofthebook.us/2007/02/.
25. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 279.

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Future Husbands and Cheerleaders: A Review of OMI's Cheerleader and Meghan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband"

Meghan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband" and OMI's song "Cheerleader" have striking similarities. Musically they are both fun and upbeat songs. Both songs engage with the idea of marriage and outline what they expect and value in their potential spouse. However, the two songs offer conflicting ideas of what a good husband and wife look like. It is almost comical that "Cheerleader," from a man's perspective, describes the potential wife as a mere cheerleader and "Dear Future Husband," from the woman's perspective even if only satirically,{1} describes the potential husband as a mere servant. That brings me to the final comparison: both songs expect the spouse to be an aid in providing whatever the artist desires.

However, there are some truths hidden in these songs about the role of husband and wife in marriage that can best be understood and even celebrated through a biblical understanding of marriage.

Marriage as a Deal

Meghan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband" is basically a list of criteria that a man must accomplish or agree to before he is allowed to marry her. The song introduces
the list by remarking "Here's a few things you'll need to know if you wanna be my one and only all my life." Trainor spells out examples of what she expects from her husband including

taking her on dates, telling her she is beautiful, not correcting her, apologizing, buying her a ring, opening doors for her, and even letting her sleep on the left side of the bed. Then of course she adds the the catch—all requests such as “be a classy guy,” “treat me like a lady,” and “love me right.”
The song also outlines what he will get in return as a reward if he does everything right. She will only “be the perfect wife,” buy groceries, give “some kisses,” be his “one and only all [her] life,” give “that special loving” if he does exactly what she asks of him. Additionally, he will have to expect that she will be crazy (at least some of the time), she will correct but not be corrected, she will not cook, and they will favor her extended family over his. What a deal! And unfortunately that is exactly what marriage is conflated into—a deal, an exchange.

Most of these actions are pretty standard ways men show love to their wives. However, men should not and likely do not perform the acts because of a contractual agreement or because of expectations. How can this man show true unconditional and sacrificial love to his wife if he does these actions out of duty or hope of reward?

This marred picture of marriage is so faulty because it offers a picture of marriage that is a one-sided willingness to be served by her husband and then only serve him as a response. Even though the song lists loving actions in marriage, this picture of marriage is ultimately selfish, conditional, manipulative, and loveless.

Marriage as a Cheerleader

Looking to “Cheerleader,” the song offers a more hopeful and less distorted picture of marriage—however, we are still left wanting. The future wife in OMI’s song is a woman characterized by her support, affection, strength, physical beauty, readiness to serve, and faithfulness. All these

attributes are biblically commendable and should even be sought after.Yet, what does OMI, as the future husband, offer to her? Fidelity and sex. In contrast to
Trainor's song, here the husband remains rightly faithful and offers sex because he values his wife so much, especially her ability to support him.{2}

However, again the picture seems woefully incomplete. The song portrays a limited picture of women by reducing his future wife to only a handful of attributes that benefit him. His wife should be more than a mere cheerleader. She is simply a tool he can pull out whenever he wants or needs her. The song further reduces—and in some ways even dehumanizes—her by focusing on the services she can offer him. As a result, she is not represented as her own person with her own needs and desires.

Marriage as a Picture of Unity



Ultimately marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church—a picture both songs catch a small glimpse of. When Trainor in "Dear Future Husband" desires (albeit via demand) for her husband to show her love by serving her and affirming her, she desires something that is biblical. Husbands are called to nourish, cherish, honor, embrace, protect, and love their wives.{3} Having biblical standards in what to expect in a husband is what God wants, but not through demands and deals.

OMI also desires legitimate attributes in his wife. He values a wife who will support and affirm him. In Genesis God created woman with Adam's need for companionship and assistance in mind.{4} Proverbs 31 describes an excellent wife as a woman who is strong, trustworthy and praiseworthy.{5} However,

Proverbs 31 does not just define an excellent wife in those terms; the excellent wife is generous, wise, skilled, dignified, and uses her time buying, selling, trading, and providing for her entire household. So when OMI seeks an excellent wife, he gets a cheerleader—but if he were to look for a biblically defined wife of excellence then the proverb would ring true, that "he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."{6}

But neither artist has the full picture. Marriage is not an exchange of services—yes, spouses should serve each other; not out of duty but out of a thankful and loving heart. The element that is missing from both songs is the true and complete needs and desires of the opposite spouse. However, both songs together offer a fuller picture of what each spouse needs and desires. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives, something Trainor focused on, and for wives to respect their husbands, as OMI touched on through valuing affirmation from his wife.{7}

Genesis describes marriage as becoming one flesh, and following that theme Paul in Ephesians calls husbands to "love his wife as himself."{8} By being one flesh, spouses should see their separate wills as one unified will and their separate body as one body. Paul writes that concerning this idea of unity, "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."{9} This picture of marriage is strikingly different from the deal-making, manipulating, and self-serving marriage according to Trainor and OMI.

The true beauty and blessing in marriage for the Christian, is ultimately that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Again in Ephesians, Paul refers to marriage by writing, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."{10} When a man and a woman marry, they symbolize unity that is fully

complete between Christ and His people.{11}

However, because of our sin we were incapable of being united with Christ. In order for Christ to marry his Church he had to make us clean and even righteous. Christ accomplished this by taking our place and dying on the cross for our sins so we might receive the righteousness of Christ. In that way, when God the Father looks down at His Church He sees a people who are flawless and thus fitting to be united with His son. Christ is the perfect husband, and when we are complete in our glorification, we will be the perfect wife as the Church.

Marriage as a Broken Picture



Yet our marriage is only a picture—a flawed and imperfect picture. Husbands abuse wives, wives undermine their husbands, and spouses cheat on each other which can all lead to separation and divorce. God did not intend marriage to be plagued by sin, and divorce and pain was not in his design.{12} However, we did sin and as a result sin has damaged our relationships, including marriage, in a deeply painful way.

Nevertheless, God still works to better our marriages. He sent the Holy Spirit to help believers in the process of sanctification—which is making us more like Christ. Both songs lack a place for sanctification. Trainor does not want to be confronted and OMI only wants to be affirmed.

But marriage is made for more than just affirming the good and ignoring the bad. Because men and women are different yet compatible, God uses marriage to aid in the process of making us more Christlike. Women tend to be more relational and emotional and men tend to be more protective and provisional.

In marriage, the wife can learn from and value her husband's strengths and the husband can learn from and value his wife's strengths, as co-heirs with Christ. And when one spouse has wronged the other they can and should go to each other for confession, repentance and reconciliation that will result in more unity and ultimately aid in their sanctification.

With the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, even in our sinful state, we can still strive to symbolize our unity in Christ in our marriages. Married Christians should continually search the Bible for insight and direction on how to better serve and love their spouse. However, both married and single Christians all wait expectantly for the glorious wedding feast celebrating our unity to Christ.

Notes

1. There has been some debate about whether or not Trainor's song is supposed to be understood as a satire. I am more inclined to think it may be hyperbolic but I think it might be too generous to call it a satire. However, most conclude that if it is meant to be satirical it does not skillfully convey that message. For more of this conversation simply google "Dear Future Husband sexist satire" and you should have plenty of articles to start on.
2. Fidelity and sex should both be a fundamental part of a biblical marriage. See Hebrews 13:4.
3. Ephesians 5:28-29, 1 Peter 3:7, and Proverbs 4:7-9. All Bible verses are in the English Standard Version.
4. Genesis 2:18.
5. Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 31:10-11, 17, 28.
6. Proverbs 18:22.
7. Ephesians 5:33.
8. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:33
9. 1 Corinthians 7:4.
10. Ephesians 5:32.
11. Because marriage is a picture of the reality of our unity in Christ that is not yet fully realized, we value and guard

the sanctity of it. That is why as Christians we should be mournful at the distortions of marriage such as divorce or homosexuality. Distortions in marriage are so offensive because they distort the truth that marriage is supposed to reflect. Because marriage should be highly regarded and protected the Bible uses harsh language when speaking about sexual immorality and divorce (For example, see Malachi 2:16 for severity of husbands not loving their wives).
12. See Matthew 19:6 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

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Bad Blood Reconciled: A Review of Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood"

Probe intern Sarah Withers contrasts Taylor Swift's Bad Blood song to the deep spiritual truths of the gospel of Christ.

Naomi, a young Taylor Swift fan fighting leukemia, adopted Swift's song "Bad Blood" as her theme song during her battle with cancer. In response to her video Naomi uploaded on YouTube, Taylor Swift contributed $50,000 to Naomi's medical bills. Naomi through her heartwarming story was able to transform the song to make it inspiring and hopeful. However, as most know, the song is not about fighting terrible cancer but instead about a broken relationship. Although Swift did not disclose the antagonist, she no longer sees reconciliation as an option. By contrasting Swift's "Bad Blood" with Christ's reconciling blood, Christians are reminded of the transformative power of the gospel to bring healing and hope to broken relationships.

Destructive Power of Bad Blood

“Bad Blood,” through the lyrics and video, paints a picture of the pain that is felt after someone is wronged in a relationship. The antagonist attacking her and “rubbing it in so deep” left Swift with a “a really deep cut.” Many, if not all of us, have felt the pangs of being cut deeply with words and actions in a relationship gone wrong. A quick read through the Psalms reveals victims of broken relationships crying out in pain. The Psalmist laments, “Even my closest friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel before me.”{1}

Not only do broken relationships hurt initially and deeply, but often the pain lingers. Swift captures this experience through the lyrics, “Still got scars in my back from your knives, so don’t think it’s in the past, these kinds of wounds they last and they last.” Again the Psalmist writes, “I am restless in my complaint and I moan, because the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.”{2} One thing both the Psalms and Swift can agree on is that broken relationships and betrayal are deeply painful.

For Swift, not only is the relationship broken and painful, it is irreconcilable. She notes the hopelessness of the relationship, “I don’t think we can solve them (problems)” and “in time can heal but this won’t.” This is the most upsetting part of the song.

We all have had broken relationships, yet the ones that hurt the most are the ones that turn from feelings of hurt to feelings of hate. We should hate sin and the pain it brings with it, but we are called to love even our enemies. Ephesians 6 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the “spiritual forces of evil.”{3} As difficult as it may be, we should guard our heart from future pain without hating the individual who hurt us. Thus, reconciliation should always be the ideal goal and in cases where reconciliation

cannot or does not occur, forgiveness should still reign in our heart.

Healing Power of Christ's Blood

It seems like an impossible request to forgive someone and even move towards reconciliation with someone who betrayed and hurt us. This would be an unimaginable task if it were not for someone who did this for us first. The gospel is the perfect example of reconciliation.

When we sin, whether or not it affects anyone, we sin against God. Our most fundamental problem with sin is not that it hurts other people, but that it separates us from the love of God. Those who do not accept Christ as their savior are outside of the effect of Christ's atoning blood and therefore are not able to experience God's love. However, Paul in Ephesians says "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."{4}

Before we can offer true love and reconciliation to others, we must first receive love and be reconciled to God. The only way to turn our bad blood against God into unity with God is through the power of Christ's redeeming blood on the cross. Colossians states, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."{5} His blood cleanses us so that we are filled with the selfless love towards others that the Scriptures ask of us.{6}

Our Fight against Bad Blood

Even for Christians who have been shown love and forgiveness, we still do not always experience an overflowing of love and forgiveness for those who wrong us. We still struggle with having bad blood towards our enemies. We still feel the pain of the broken relationships even though we are in Christ. As

Christians, we look forward to a day when we will not feel pain, but while we still live in a fallen world, pain and hurt are very much part of our everyday lives.

However, the wrong that causes our pain has been or will be paid for. As Christians, if we are wronged by a believer in Christ, remember that Jesus died for those sins as well as for ours.{7} Yes, we should still lament that even believers sin and cause pain, yet justice was important enough to Christ that He died for those sins.{8} For those who sin against us and remain outside of Christ, their wrongs will be righted at the cost of their own life in eternal wrath. The hope of sharing the gospel is to offer others the redemptive power of Christ which indeed makes the gospel good news!

Looking back to the Psalms, there is a life-giving trend even within the darkness and pain. Even in Psalm 88, which is considered to be one of the darkest Psalms, the psalmist still cries out to God. In our broken relationships with others, true reconciliation must start and end with the grace and justice of God.

God knew we had bad blood and provided a Savior to change our hearts. He still continues to hear our cries of pain and sent the Holy Spirit to continue to protect our hearts from holding on to the bad blood in our relationships.

Notes

1. Psalm 41:9 All verses are from the English Standard Version.
2. Psalm 55:2-3, see also Psalm 69.
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:19-20
6. Hebrews 9:14
7. Ephesians 1:7
8. This is why I think St. Anselm was on the right track in

Cur Deus Homo, when he argued that Jesus Christ had to become incarnate and die for our sins so that God's justice and grace could be made manifest. If God just ignored our sins, justice would not prevail—thank God He is both just and gracious through Jesus Christ!

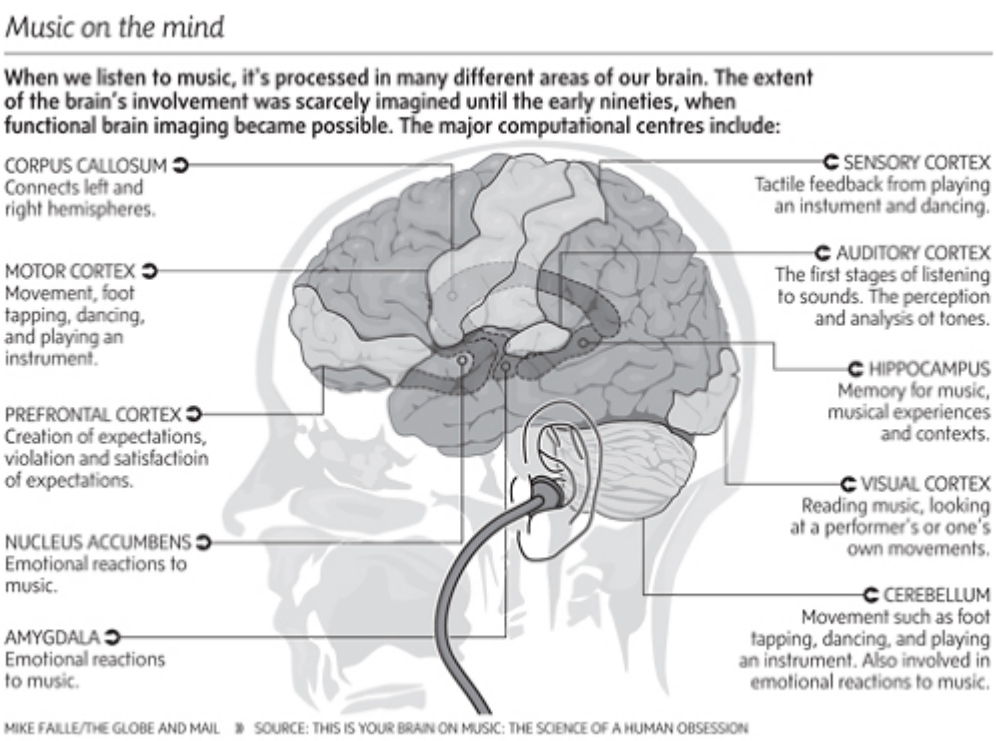
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How and Why We Should Biblically Analyze Songs

Probe intern Sarah Withers provides insight about thinking biblically about popular songs.

Numerous scientific studies have revealed that music is linked to relieving pain/stress, releasing endorphins, aiding coordination, increasing concentration, expanding memory, improving language skills, and lowering blood pressure, just to list a few.{1} Unfortunately, not all genres of music offer these benefits, so it would be quite misleading to say that critically analyzing songs can act as a remedy for migraines—however convenient and persuasive that claim might be!

While I may not be able to claim health advantages, powerful benefits can be gleaned for us and others by being aware and graciously critical of songs. I hope that I can provide how and why we should biblically analyze songs and challenge you to be a more thoughtful and gracious critical consumer of all types of music.



How Do We Biblically Analyze a Song?

The most obvious first step to biblically analyzing a song is to actively listen to the lyrics and sometimes even watch the music video. It helps me focus and understand if I pull up the lyrics and read along as I listen. While I listen, I think about how the song makes me feel, what the song got right or wrong in its worldview, what I appreciate about the song, and any questions about possible meanings and interpretations. I also think about if or how I can relate to the song's message. Have I ever experienced, desired, or seen something similar to the song's message? If the answer is no, then maybe I could think about how seeing the songwriter's perspective could help me relate and communicate with someone with very different desires and experiences than my own.

Ultimately we biblically critique a song by shining the light of the biblical truths on it. No secular song gets everything right for the obvious reason that the gospel is not present. For some songs all that is missing is an explicit reference to the gospel, while other songs directly conflict with the

gospel. Yet, for even the more difficult songs, Christians can understand the song's message for the glory of God.

For example, Lana Del Rey's song "Born to Die"{2} provides the message that we should enjoy life because when we die there is nothing left for us. For those in Christ, that song is radically wrong about our purpose and destiny.

However, for those who are outside of Christ, that song paints a rather apt picture of their bleak destiny.{3} So yes, the song is very dark and upsetting, yet when I hear that song I can mourn for those outside of Christ and praise God that the lyrics of that song are not true for me. In that way, that song can incite worship and foster resolve to reach out to unbelievers-something Del Rey probably would never consider possible! That is the transformative power of the gospel, the greatest good news.

However, there are songs that Christians should avoid. Songs that are overly sexualized or demonic in nature may be too difficult to redeem.{4} Also some people are more affected by music than others. If you are not able to redeem the song by countering it with life-giving truths from Scripture and the song continues to bring you down, then you should not listen to it. Christians should pray for wisdom and guidance to know when to listen and engage and when to turn it off.{5}

Why Should We Care?

Since music is so integrated into our daily lives, many of us are consumers of music whether we are intentional about it or not. The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1996 (AAP) found that 14- to 16-year-olds listened to an overage of 40 hours of music per week. For a more conservative number, RAIN (Radio and Internet Newsletter) reported that students "spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes a day consuming media, 2 hours 19 minutes of which is spent listening to music."{6}

While these studies focus on teens and adolescents, it is fair to say that adults also listen to a fair amount of music, whether it is through headphones at work or the radio in the car. When it comes down to it, music is very much part of our everyday life. For some it can be avoided, but by most, it is accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Musical lyrics are also sticky. It never ceases to amaze me how I can still easily sing along to songs from my childhood the second the second it plays. Yet, when discussing my project of biblically analyzing popular music, a common response is that people often do not listen to the lyrics, but rather just enjoy the melody and beat. The AAP (1996) reported that "in one study 30% of teenagers knew the lyrics to their favorite songs," which would seem to affirm that initial claim.

With those intuitions and findings, it would be easy to undermine this project as interesting but unimportant. However, the same AAP (2009) article cited the Knobloch-Westerwick *et al*. study that "although young listeners might not understand all the details in lyrics, they recognize enough to obtain a general idea of the message they bring."

Moreover, the fact that we do remember song lyrics well after we have stopped listening to them shows that we are aware of the words even if we are not actively thinking about the message. In many respects we have become passive consumers of information and entertainment, especially when it comes to music. It is in light of this passivity that we should strive to be active listeners.

Every song with words carries a message, although some are more obvious and dangerous than others. For example, current artists such as Macklemore, Hozier, Lana Del Rey, and Lady Gaga proclaim more explicit messages and agendas in their songs-something as Christians we should be aware of and ready to critique. The AAP (1996) claimed that "awareness of, and

sensitivity to, the potential impact of music lyrics by consumers, the media, and the music industry is crucial.”

Although the rate and impact of the consumption of songs can be debated, there are still benefits of being aware of and engaging with our culture through songs.

What Are the Benefits?

Well, there are three main benefits to biblically analyzing songs. First, we refine our ability to enjoy music. For many this will be very counterintuitive. People I have talked with have feared that if they are too critical of the music’s message, then they will no longer be able to enjoy it. I will agree, there are some songs that might be ruined by listening critically to the lyrics. However, Christians should likely avoid listening to those songs anyway.

Even with songs we don’t like, we can still enjoy them for their musicality and benefit from some insights, however hard to find. The vast majority of songs are redeemable even though they may counter the gospel. Where God provides the songwriter with common grace insights, there is an opportunity to redeem the song. Remember Lana Del Rey’s song; I am still able to enjoy her powerful use of a darker sound and message, but I am also reminded of the hope I have in the gospel.

If we get to a point where we become cynical and antagonistic towards our music culture, we should remember that God gave us music and culture as a gift. The Psalms are examples of a great variety of songs that were written to offer the expression of truth about God, humanity, and our world. The obvious difference is that the Psalms are God-breathed and inspired—yet there are often truths that can be gleaned even from secular and popular songs. After all, we are all made in God’s image and bear His music-loving traits.

Another benefit of analyzing songs is the ability to learn

about our culture and the people influenced by it. Regardless of whether the lyrics are true, they are believed to be true by the songwriter and often by people in our culture. Part of the appeal of songs is that they are relatable. Relatability makes the song powerful and influential.

We can gain invaluable insight into the thoughts of our culture and younger generations through the lyrics of songs. Many songs provide commentary on our culture's view of alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, relationships, sexuality, freedom, and self-worth. By learning what the songs say about such topics, we can be better equipped to understand where people are coming from.

The final benefit which naturally flows from the previous one is being able to relate and engage with our culture. By engaging with themes in songs, we are ultimately practicing how to engage with people. I was talking with a group of high school students about one of Macklemore's songs called "Starting Over" which is about his relapse as an alcoholic. The song is marked with shame, a deep sense of failure, and loss of identity. Before listening to the song, I encouraged them to listen to the lyrics as if a person was talking with them. With that perspective, students would be less likely to immediately judge him as a failure, and instead would be more likely to empathize and relate as we are all failures and slaves to sin outside of Christ.

By being aware of songs, we can better engage the lies of our culture and counter them with the truths of Scripture.{7} The AAP (1996 & 2009), encourages parents to "become media-literate" which means "watching television with their children and teenagers, discussing the content with them, and initiating the process of selective viewing at an early age." Later in the article, the authors even suggest that parents should look up the lyrics and become familiar with them. Even if you are not a parent, as Christians one way we can help

correct lies of our culture is through conversations about popular music.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is our hope and joy that we have been redeemed and my prayer that Christians will show others the light of Christ.

So, the goal of analyzing songs from a Christian perspective is not merely an academic exercise that challenges critical thought, but to move us to action. Peter claimed that Christians were saved so “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”{8} Ultimately we should be encouraged to talk, relate, empathize, and love others. Through songs we can help others to “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”{9}

Notes

1. Another article that was particularly helpful was from the eMedExpert. However, if you just search “benefits to music” (or the like) and you will be overwhelmed by how many articles develop all the unique benefits to music.
2. The video includes sexual content, brief drug use, and a violent image at the end.
3. I should note however, that the song seems to hold the message of mere extinction at death. As Christians, we believe that souls are immortal which means even the non-believer persists. For those outside of Christ, they will experience death as eternal wrath and destruction. See John 3:36, Roman 6:23, Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 21:8.
4. To address briefly the pushback on the idea that we can or should “redeem culture”: The confusion rests in the nuanced

difference in meaning of the word “redeemed.” I use the word “redeemed” in this context to mean something closer to transformed by truth, not redeemed in the sense God has redeemed believers. Yes, Scriptures never call us to “redeem culture” but God does call us to let the light of truth shine. By engaging culture with the truth of Scriptures, Christians can make aspects of culture honoring to God, thus in that sense redeeming them. For example, pornography falls under the category of “unredeemable,” meaning that there is no way someone could make pornography honoring to God. However, with different aspects of culture this task is possible and I think should be encouraged.

5. See Hebrews 5:14.

6. RAIN cited The Kaiser Family Foundation study for these statistics. The report also broke down how the kids and teens were listening to the music, finding that on average per day they listen to 41 minutes of music on their IPod and similar devices, 32 minutes of music on computers (iTunes and Internet radio), and 32 minutes listening to the radio.

7. See Ephesians 6:17-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

8. 1 Peter 2:9.

9. Colossians 2:8

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