

# unChristian: Is Christianity's Image Hurting Christ's Image?

*Byron Barlowe reviews the book unChristian, based on research on what young people think of evangelicals and born-again Christians: that they're hypocritical, judgmental, too political, exclusive. He calls out Christians to improve the reality behind the image to better reflect Christ.*

**Section Synopsis:** *A recent book entitled unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters uncovered overwhelmingly negative views of evangelicals and born-again Christians, especially among young generations. In some ways these views are warranted, in some ways they are not, but Christians do well to take them as a wake-up call for the sake of those God wants to save and mature.*

The meaning of *gospel* is literally "good news." The book *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*[\[1\]](#) is a book of bad news—that half of those outside the church have a negative perception of Christianity. And that's even true of many young people inside the church.



Evangelical Christians by definition consider Jesus' charge to present the biblical gospel message to the world a mandate. Yet many of the very people who they reach out to are rejecting the messengers. Researchers with the Barna Group found that a majority today believe that evangelical and born-again Christians are sheltered from the real world, are judgmental, way too political, anti-homosexual (to the point of being gay-hating), and hypocritical.

These are widespread perceptions, especially among sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, even those who go to church. To many people, perception is ninety percent of reality. So whatever your opinion of the study, this is the feeling out there.

Barna's survey results and commentary have been making a stir through *unChristian* since its release in 2007. It's not a deep theological or philosophical book. It contains statistical interpretation broken up by commentary from every stripe of evangelical Christian. It is a sobering cultural assessment that calls out believers to be more Christlike.

The authors' applications are not always solidly based. They seem a little dismissive of valid objections to their analysis and conclusions. Also, confusion among unchurched respondents about the meaning of the terms "born again" and "evangelical" leads one to ask, How seriously do we take survey-takers' critique of Christians if they don't even know who or what these Christians are? That is, many times the people being surveyed couldn't clearly define what "born-again" means or what an "evangelical" is, so how much stock should we put in their criticisms?

Yet, the stats are stark enough to be alarming: of those outside the church, fully half had a bad impression of evangelicals. Only three percent had a good impression! Are Christians so bent on moral persuasion that we're alienating the lost with a lovelessness that really is unChristian? Or is this just a case of the unsaved experiencing the gospel as a stumbling block, as Jesus said would happen? The authors say it's mainly Christians' fault; I agree but suspect there's more to it.

Here's a modest proposal: even if respondents were biased or misled, why don't we in the church humble ourselves, listen, and change where we need to? In the spirit of King David, when Shimei cursed him loudly, we may need to simply say, "Let them critique. The Lord told them to."

Some question whether perceptions of outsiders should shape the church's behavior. Co-authors Kinnaman and Lyons make the case that the church needs to be thoughtful about our responses to homosexuals, less trusting of political action as the way to change culture, and *more humble* and open to people who have not yet experienced grace. If outsiders feel that we are running a club they're not invited to, where is Christ in that? they ask.

According to the authors, "Theologically conservative people are increasingly perceived as aloof and unwilling to talk." But those under 30 "are the ultimate 'conversation generation'." Those outside church want to discuss issues, but see Christians as unwilling. Have you recently had a spiritual dialogue with a young unbeliever? How'd it go?

## "Christians Are Hypocritical"

**Section Synopsis:** *unChristian documents a heavy bias against Christians as hypocritical, a charge which is in part true, admit many. But it's also an unavoidable reality of a grace-based religion, which if explained, goes a long way towards mitigating the charge and explaining the gospel message.*

One overwhelming opinion among the survey group is that Christians are *hypocrites* and this keeps people away from church.

In fact, the survey on which the book is based reveals blatant legalism among believers, that the top priority of born-again Christians is, "doing the right thing, being good, and not sinning." This do-your-best value topped biblical values like "relationships, evangelism, service and family faith." In another survey, four out of five churchgoers said that "the Christian life is well described as, 'trying hard to do what God commands'." [\[2\]](#) Such a primary focus on *lifestyle* and sin-management as a measure of spirituality leads to what they

call a “false pretense of holiness,” that is, hypocrisy.[{3}](#) It’s often like we Christians are living for others’ approval and forgetting about grace.

This isn’t lost on younger generations. “Like it or not, the term ‘hypocritical’ has become fused with young peoples’ experience of Christianity,” say the authors.[{4}](#) *Eighty-five percent* of “outsiders” and *half of young churchgoers* say so. The book offers story after painful story of sometimes breathtaking hypocrisy based on lengthy interviews. This adds weight to the conclusions drawn by Kinnaman and Lyons. The research was not simply based on surveys (quantitative) but also on in-depth interviews (qualitative).

There may be a silver lining here. The charge of hypocrisy offers a handy starting point for turning around negative perceptions and explaining grace. Pastor and author Tim Keller admits that we Christians actually *are* often hypocritical and need to be humble about it. Unrepentant hypocrites don’t admit mistakes, so we immediately challenge a perception by owning up to it.

But the other unavoidable fact is that non-Christians assume we are *trying* to live like Jesus to *get into* heaven, like the good-works motivation of other religions and cults. So, when they find out we’re not perfect people, they critique us as hypocrites. In contrast, an old saying captures the biblical worldview: “The Church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.”[{5}](#) Unbelievers simply cannot understand this; we have to be patient with that, says Keller.

You could respond to the accusation of hypocrisy like this: “I have a relationship with Christ not because I’m good but precisely because I am not good. He rescued me from myself and the ruin I was causing. But He’s changing me. I’m still a mess, but I’m God’s mess.”

In an age of Internet image-making and advertising, young

outsiders are cynical about finding anybody who's genuine. Christians need to genuinely repent of hypocrisy. Meanwhile, we can explain that grace means our imperfections are covered by God during the process of spiritual transformation. Maybe outsiders will opt for grace once they see more of it.

## **"Christians Hate Homosexuals"**

***Section Synopsis:** Evangelical and born-again Christians today have a well-deserved but understandable reputation as anti-gay, but attitudes can go so far as being gay-hating. Balancing conviction about the broader gay agenda and the personal sin of homosexuality with a humble compassion for gay individuals who are made in God's image is key, especially as we model for younger believers.*

The guys in my Bible study group were discussing gay marriage and the upcoming elections. The lively banter stopped when I dropped a bomb. "You know," I said, "when most non-Christians under thirty-years-old find out we're evangelicals, we may as well be wearing a sandwich board emblazoned with 'God hates gays.'" I'd been reading *unChristian*, and it was sobering.

According to the authors, if we're raising kids to "shun their peers who are 'different,' we are actually limiting their . . . spiritual influence" and may lead them to question their own faith.[\[6\]](#) Why? Because they'll probably have friends who identify as gay and other sexual identities. As Probe colleague Kerby Anderson says, "One of the biggest challenges for churches and individual Christians who reach out to homosexuals is keeping two principles in proper tension: biblical convictions and biblical compassion."[\[7\]](#)

An emerging adult generation accepts homosexuality, often without thinking, even those who grew up in church. Only one-third of churched young people believe homosexuality to be a "major problem."

And, only a small percentage of young adults “want to resist homosexual initiatives” in society. This is alarming, given America’s softening of sexual morals, mainstreaming of gay culture and the redefinition of marriage. But the issue addressed in *unChristian* is that in our battle against a few agenda-driven radicals, we’ve regularly forgotten that our fight is not with same-sex strugglers, but with unbiblical ideas.[\[8\]](#) We’re called to love, not condemn, the people made in God’s image who are caught up in sin, even while we stand up as Christian citizens.

Barna’s survey shows just how unbiblical self-identified Christians can be. Over half said homosexuality was a problem, but only two out of six hundred people said anything about love or “being sympathetic” as a potential solution. A mere one percent say they pray for homosexuals! “We need to downgrade the importance of being antihomosexual as a ‘credential,’” of our commitment to Christ, say the authors.[\[9\]](#) That is, we need to repent if we believe that it’s a spiritual badge of honor to be anti-gay.

If a certain brand of sin is disgusting to us, why should that get in the way of communicating the love of a forgiving God? We need to keep in mind that *all* sin is disgusting to God, even our pet sins. This is the kind of challenge the book *unChristian* does well. Yet, scant mention is made of the greater consequences of sexual sins, including sickness and the desperate need for repentance and recovery among same-sex practitioners. Perhaps that would have been off-point for this book.

Kinnaman observes that younger generations are “hard-wired for relational connections” and view the church’s lack of spiritual solutions as uncaring and insincere. If we lose our audience due to heartlessness it won’t matter how much truth we proclaim.

# “Christians Are Judgmental”

**Section Synopsis:** *“Christians are judgmental” is an accusation coming from young people inside and outside the Church today. Believers need to learn to retain the biblical mandate to judge the fruits of ideas and behaviors while going out of our way not to condemn people who’ve never (or seldom) experienced God’s grace.*

One of the most troubling perceptions that a watching world has of “born agains” and “evangelicals”, especially among the under-thirty crowd, is that we are judgmental. The book *unChristian* cites findings that ninety percent of “outsiders” believe this. More than half of young churchgoers agree!

It’s not compromise to graciously work with disagreements. Sometimes the need to be right and “stay right” cancels out the truth we’re trying to defend. To use the old saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This seems to be the main finding the research revealed.

The authors credit young generations with insightfulness into peoples’ *motives* since they’ve been endlessly targeted by marketing, lectures, and sermons. (Most have spent time in church, by the way.) They don’t want unsolicited advice, say the authors. But that makes them resistant, *not* unreachable. Another factor is that younger generations reject black-and-white views. “They esteem context, ambiguity, and tension. . . . *How* we communicate [to them] is just as important as *what* we communicate,” according to the book. [{10}](#) One popular author is seeing fruit among younger people by focusing on God Himself as the original community, the Trinity, and giving credence to our need for community.[{11}](#)

Well, aren’t unbelievers the ones judging believers? Aren’t Christians just standing up to sin? In-depth interviews showed that many respondents “believe Christians are trying . . . to

justify feelings of moral and spiritual superiority.”[{12}](#) My opinion is this: If we think we’re better, we need to revisit Amazing Grace! Arrogance is the charge; are you guilty of it? I know I’ve been.

What does it mean to be judgmental? People are stumbling over stuff like this:

- Judgmentalism doesn’t stop to ask why people do the things they do and why they are the way they are. That is, it just doesn’t care.
- Judgmental minds see everything in terms of rules kept or rules broken.
- A judgmental heart maintains the us-them dichotomy, keeping people at a distance from us. Holding people in contempt is easier when we lump them into categories.
- The core belief of a judgmental spirit is, “I’m right and I’m better.”

It’s true, the worldview of young generations in America has shifted in recent years to include a “do-it-yourself” morality and this is deeply troubling. Youth apologist Josh McDowell notes that seniors have the emotional maturity of freshmen today. Many suffer from broken families.[{13}](#) Still, an entire generation—churched and many formerly-churched—doubts our motives. Yes, they are judging us! But if our attitudes truly are stiff-arming people, shouldn’t we start sympathetically inviting them into God’s fellowship?

Christ-followers have a very hard time distinguishing between judging *people* and judging *what they do*. Scripture teaches us clearly not to condemn people to hell. Paul the Apostle taught that he didn’t even judge himself, much less outsiders. Yet we are told to judge fruits, which consist of what people do. That way, we know if we’re dealing with an unbelieving person, a confused believer or a mature disciple of Christ. If an



unbeliever commits sin, we can see from it how to minister to them.

We church folks say, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” Those studied said they experience hate of the sin *and* the sinner. Much of church peoples’ discomfort and judgmentality stems from cultural and generational sources. If something like tattoos gets in the way of a Christlike response, maybe we need to take a fresh look at our attitudes.

## How Can True Christians Constructively Respond?

**Section Synopsis:** *Repairing a damaged image is a worthy goal for Christians so that critics can see Christ instead of negative stereotypes. We can tear down stereotypes by being Christlike and then we have a chance to tear down deeper misconceptions about God, the Bible, and faith.*

The panhandler touched Dave’s heart with his honest appeal. “I just want a burger.” Throughout the meal, Dave talked with him, finding out about his life and views. He didn’t try to cram the gospel in or argue. Dave later overheard the man say to his homeless companion, “Hey that guy’s a Christian and we actually had a conversation.” Dave wondered what kind of negative interactions with Christians from the past prompted that response!

The authors of *unChristian* uncovered a low public opinion of evangelicals and born-again Christians among outsiders. They may be biased, but it’s helpful to know what people think.

One of the most important ministries you can have these days is to tear down negative stereotypes of Christ-followers simply by being Christlike. That may set the stage for tearing down myths and lies about God, the Bible, and Christianity.

We need to seek common ground to begin a dialogue with those

outside the faith. We all respond to agreement better than arguments, so affirming is a good start towards persuading. I recently saw a bumper sticker on the truck of a worker. It said in effect, "Jesus loves you but I think you're a jerk", although in more colorful language! After I chuckled about how God loves "jerks" like me, we spent forty-five minutes discussing his views, mostly on God and religion.

At one point, he proclaimed, "I like to think of God as feminine." I explored his reasons, which included the presence of beauty in the world. I affirmed that observation far as I could and expanded his thinking. I said, "What if God is so big and complete that He embodies perfect femininity *and* masculinity?" The door opened wider. But what if I'd acted offended by the cuss word on the sticker or been put off by his distorted theology? I'm sure he would have been put off and the conversation would have been aborted.

Again, we also need to admit mistakes and problems, say the authors. Youth today emphasize "keepin' it real," being genuine. "Transparency disarms an image-is-everything generation."[{14}](#)

Lastly, the authors urge us to respond with truth *and* love to gays and their friends. Speaking out against homosexual sin and harmful politics may be our role. At the same time, Kerby Anderson points out that Christians "should lovingly welcome those who struggle with homosexual temptations and dedicate [ourselves] to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of" homosexual strugglers.[{15}](#)

Our tone of voice, demeanor and facial expression are much more important than we think. As Tim Keller says, "You actually have to embody a different kind of Christian than the ones that they've known in the past or they're simply not going to listen to what you're saying."[{16}](#)

## Notes

1. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why it Matters* (BakerBooks: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007).
2. David Kinnaman and Lyons, 51
3. Ibid, 49.
4. Ibid, 42. 5. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton/Penguin Group, New York, New York: 2008), 54.
6. Kinnaman and Lyons, 99.
7. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Harvest House: Eugene, Oregon, 2008), 82.
8. Ephesians 6:12 (NASB). See: [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com).
9. Kinnaman and Lyons, 105.
10. Ibid, 183.
11. Tim Keller, interviewed by Ed Stetzer, researcher, blogger and host of Inside Lifeway, posted April 24, 2008, [lifeway.edgeboss.net/download/lifeway/corp/IL\\_Evangelism\\_and\\_Keller.mp3](http://lifeway.edgeboss.net/download/lifeway/corp/IL_Evangelism_and_Keller.mp3).
12. Kinnaman and Lyons, 182.
13. Josh McDowell, as quoted by Charlie Mack, staff representative of Faculty Commons (Campus Crusade for Christ) in a PowerPoint® presentation presented to professors at Michigan State University, Spring, 2008.
14. Kinnaman and Lyons, 56.
15. Kerby Anderson, 83-84.
16. Keller, "Inside Lifeway" interview.

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## Probe Survey 2020 Report 6:

# Nothing in Particulars and Biblical Views

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

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

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

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

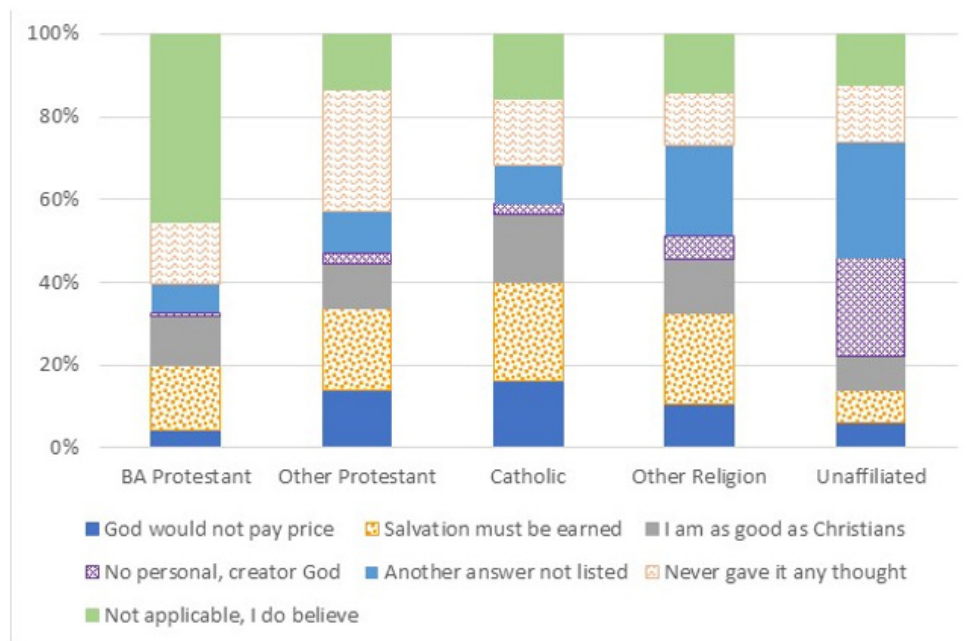
In these three areas, we will discover that most NIPs disagree with biblical teaching on these topics.

## Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

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

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

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



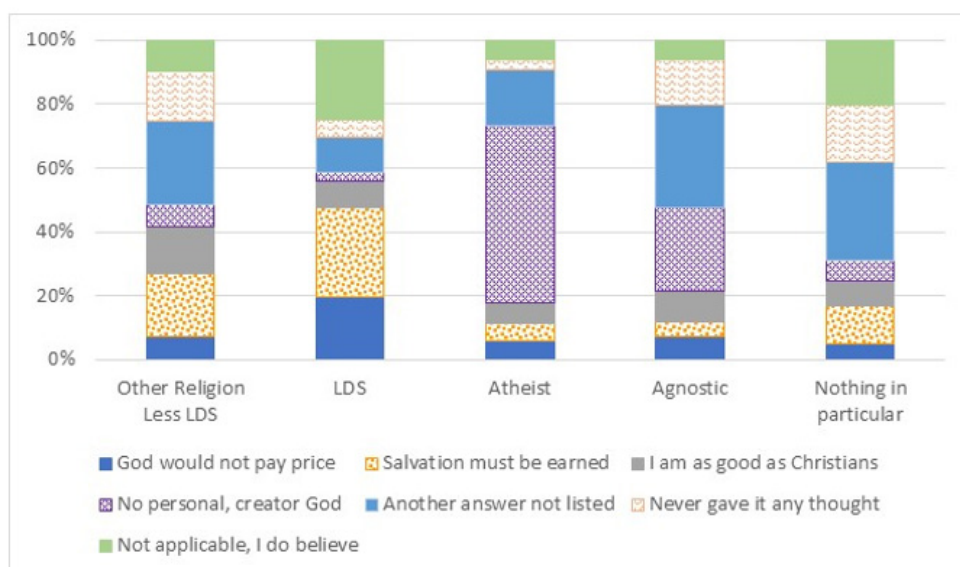
First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in [Report #4](#). But in the current

discussion, we want to focus on Other Religion and Unaffiliated. Respondents from Other Religions were most likely to select either "salvation must be earned" or "another answer not listed." A smaller percentage, just over 10%, selected "I am clearly as good as Christians I know. That answer appeared to be irrelevant to them.

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

To get a better understanding of what drives these results, we dove further into the makeup of each of these two groups. The results are shown in Figure 2.[{2}](#)

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



We divided Other Religions into the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and all other non-Christian religions. We divided the Unaffiliated into Atheist, Agnostic and Nothing in Particular. As shown, the LDS respondents are much more likely than other religions to select “salvation must be earned,” “I do believe,” and “God would not pay the price.” Almost one quarter of the LDS selected “I do believe” which explains how the Other Religion category showed about 15% with that answer. So we see that a strong majority of LDS people believe that they must do something more than believing in Christ to achieve salvation. At the same time, a significant minority believe in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

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

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

The Nothing in Particular group (NIPs) has a significantly

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

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

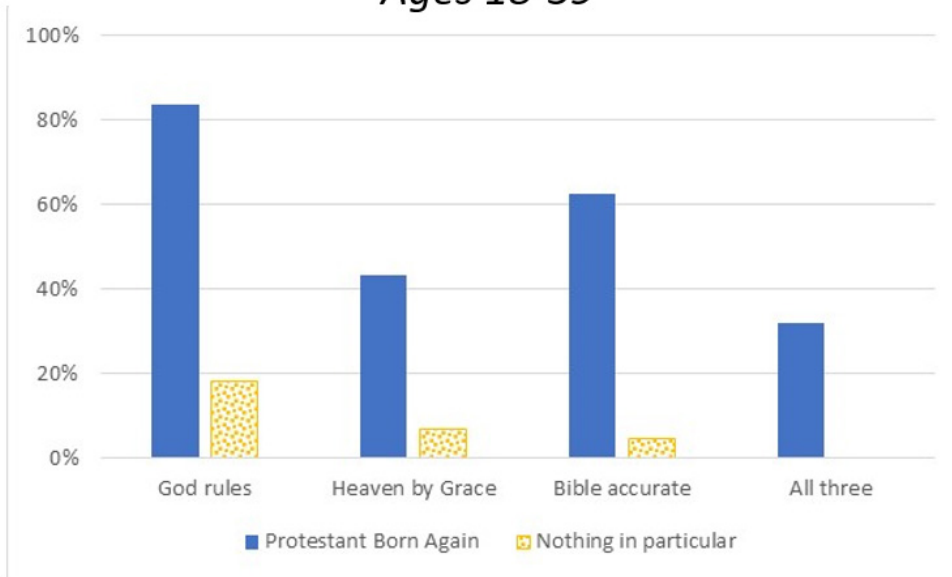
## **NIPS and a Subset of a Biblical Worldview**

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

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



*Figure 3 Biblical Worldview Comparison  
Ages 18-39*



Let's compare the results for Born-again Protestants and those who claimed to be Nothing in Particular. As shown in Figure 3, for each of the questions those agreeing with a

biblical worldview among the Nothing in Particulars is a small fraction of those among Born-again Protestants. When we combine the three questions together, we see one out of three Born-again Protestants vs. no NIPs. Certainly, some of these NIPs came from an evangelical background, but none of them interviewed in our survey ascribe to a basic evangelical worldview as adults. As noted in our first report, one in three born-again Protestants is a disappointing percentage ascribing to these biblical worldview questions, but it is certainly dramatically better than the Nothing in Particular group.

## NIPs and Biblical Sexual Morality

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

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



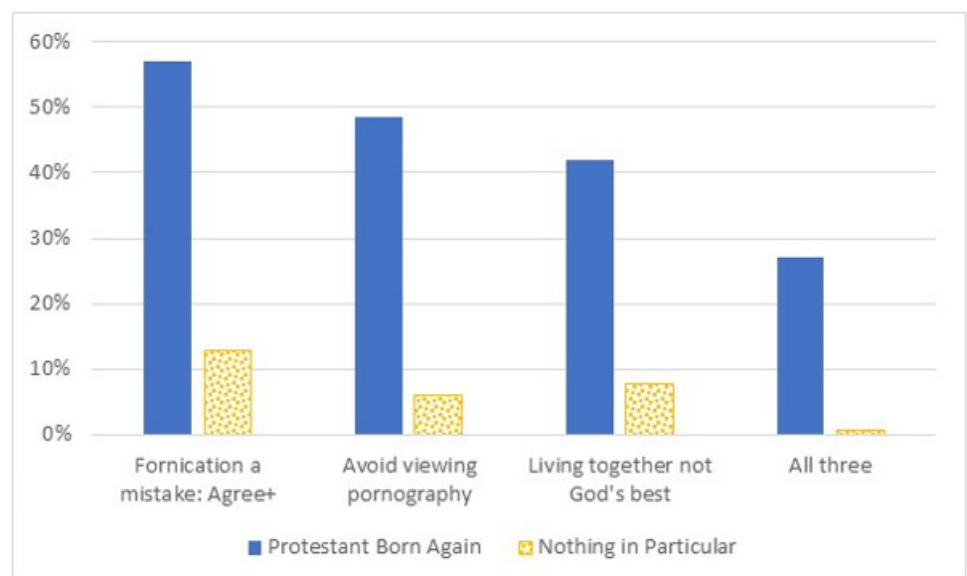
- **a. To be avoided**
  - b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
  - c. A matter of personal choice
  - d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
  - e. Don't know
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
- a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
  - b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
  - c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
  - **d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.**

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

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

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

*Figure 4 Comparison of Sexual Morality  
Ages 18 - 39*



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

## Summary

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

as we apply our limited sample to the entire group across the United States. In this case, we surveyed 68 LDS, 178 Other Religions not LDS, 124 Atheist, 167 Agnostic, and 245 Nothing in particular (between 18 and 39 years old).

3. Other answers to select from: God created but is no longer involved with the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal human potential; there are many gods, each with their different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; there is no such thing as God; and don't know.

4. [The Answer Is the Resurrection: Sharing Your Faith in Christ \(probe.org\)](http://probe.org)

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

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

## Biblical Perspective on Truth

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

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

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



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

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

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

# Truth Is Central to the Gospel

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

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

From these passages we see that:

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

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

## Challenge of Deception

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **News Media As a Source of Misinformation**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Uncovering Misinformation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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3. Terry Eastland, "The Collapse of Big Media," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2005.
4. Jonathan Weisman and Nell Henderson, "Economic News Isn't Helping Bush," *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2005, D1, accessed online at [tinyurl.com/9krga](http://tinyurl.com/9krga).
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9. Michael Ennis, “Dissing Darwin,” *Texas Monthly*, April 2005, accessed online at [www.texasmonthly.com/preview/2005-04-01/ennis](http://www.texasmonthly.com/preview/2005-04-01/ennis).

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## A Biblical View on Inflation

*For some time, we have been told that inflation is either insignificant or that it is transitory. But even now, most economists and government leaders will acknowledge that inflation is here to stay for the foreseeable future. How should we think about inflation from a biblical perspective? What lessons can we learn from the past? How can we prepare for the future?*

### History of Inflation

Most countries and empires have had to address the problem of inflation. This includes the nation of Israel. God (speaking through the prophet Isaiah) pronounced judgment on the land because the country that once was full of justice had debased the currency and its products. “Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water” (Isaiah 1:22). People were cheating each other by adding cheaper metals to their silver and by adding water to their wine.

When people do this, it is called counterfeiting and is severely punished. It was punishable by the death penalty in

the Roman Empire. Even today, counterfeiting in China warrants life imprisonment. Unfortunately, when governments debase the currency, it is merely called monetary policy and justified to keep the government functioning.

Governments insist on honest weights and measures, but usually exempt themselves from that requirement. Micah 6:11 asks, "Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?" A government will prosecute someone who has dishonest weights and measures but allow its own government leaders and central bank to debase their currency.

In previous centuries, kings and citizens engaged in coin-clipping. This form of inflation was more visible. Today, paying back investors and citizens with devalued dollars is less visible and more insidious.

In a statement by someone regarded as one of the most important economists of the twentieth century, British economist John Maynard Keynes noted how inflation affects a nation and its citizens. He said: "By a continuing process of inflation, governments can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens."

He also added, "There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law that come down on the side of destruction and does so in a manner that not one man in a million is able to diagnose."

What is the impact of inflation? The impact is felt in higher prices. In fact, the classical definition of inflation is "a rise in the general level of prices of goods and services in an economy over a period of time." If you want to calculate the impact of inflation on your family, you can use the



mathematical “rule of 72.” Take the current inflation rate and divide it into seventy-two. That will give you the number of years at that rate of inflation it will take for prices to double.

## **Consumer Price Index**

Most Americans are starting to realize that the current inflation rate

is different than the consumer price index (CPI). The government uses a different methodology from the past. Here are a few reasons why the CPI is not an accurate measure of inflation.

First, the government’s figures understate the inflation rate because they exclude food and fuel costs from its rate of “core inflation.” The argument is that food and fuel are too unstable to be included in the inflation rate. But those costs are the ones we consumers feel the most. In fact, most of us spend one-third of our budgets on food and energy costs.

Second, the government also substitutes less expensive products when prices rise. In the past, economists used a “fixed basket of goods” to calculate the consumer price index. In other words, if I buy the very same goods every year, how much does the price rise? Now the government assumes that people will switch brands or foods if the price goes up. For example, if the cost of steak goes up, the consumer price index replaces the cost of steak with hamburger.

Third, in averaging the price of different commodities, the government uses the geometric mean rather than an arithmetic mean. We don’t need to get into the math. All you need to know is that technique also decreases the inflation rate.

Fortunately, various websites do provide a more accurate view of inflation. Some of them, for example, use the same basket of goods used in 1980 to estimate the current inflation rate.

They conclude that the real inflation rate is more than twice the CPI estimate.

Why did the government change the way it calculates inflation? One reason is that government officials wanted to reduce the cost-of-living adjustments for government pay outs such as Social Security. A lower consumer price index reduces the amount the government must pay beneficiaries for a cost-of-living adjustment.

### **Chuck E. Cheese**

One of my guests, in trying to explain the impact of inflation, compared it to the experience kids and parents had at Chuck E. Cheese. In the past, they would arrive at the arcade restaurant and purchase twenty dollars' worth of tokens. The kids spent their tokens and won certain games. At the end of the adventure, the kids counted their tickets and took them to the toy counter to purchase a prize.

They were thrilled that they had 1,700 points in children's currency. They were excited to trade those tokens for some real treasures. The toy counter was stocked with iPods, stuffed animals, and all sorts of prizes they are ready to take home. But their excitement faded quickly when they realized that it took 500 points just to purchase a Blow Pop. It took even more to earn a Chinese handcuff. The prizes they really wanted required hundreds of thousands of points.

This is the reality of inflation. If you type in "how much purchasing power has the dollar lost" into a search engine, you will read that "the US dollar has lost more than 96 percent of its purchasing power since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913." That would mean that a one-dollar bill from 1913 would have less than four cents of purchasing power today. The federal government has a CPI Inflation Calculator that will give you an estimate of the amount your money has been devalued based on the government's CPI

calculations.

## **Causes of Inflation**

Government leaders have been arguing that the current inflation is merely due to the disruption of supply chains. While that is partially true, it ignores the bigger picture. After all, inflation has been taking place long before the pandemic, lockdowns, and supply chain problems.

Business leaders acknowledge that providing a supply of goods due to the supply chain bottleneck has resulted in increased prices. Demand exceeds supply. Also, there are higher costs for employees and higher freight costs. Limited supplies of lumber and copper, for example, raised those costs.

But the bigger issue is the fact that the federal government and the Federal Reserve have been printing more dollars. In the past, other governments (e.g., China, Japan, etc.) would buy our treasuries. They have ceased buying those financial instruments, perhaps because they believe that this country is on an unsustainable trajectory with its high consumption, low-savings economy. This is easy to see on the graphs provided by the Federal Reserve. The M2 money stock has been increasing for many years. You will also notice that the amount of money printed shoots straight up in 2020. On some charts, you may notice something else. The weekly chart is discontinued and only updated monthly. That might give you some idea of what may be coming.

Is inflation good for you and the economy? That is what some pundits and politicians are telling us. Type in words like “inflation is good for you” or “inflation is good for the economy” and you will see the latest attempt to make us feel good about inflation.

On the one hand, inflation is good for the federal government awash in national debt. It is probably good for people in debt. You can pay back debts with devalued dollars. But

inflation also allows the federal government to continue to expand without having to live within its means. State governments must live within their means and balance their state budgets. Families are supposed to live within their means, though many take on significant debt. Our previous books, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt* and *A Biblical Point of View on Money* are relevant to these concerns.

On the other hand, inflation is devastating for most people in society. Rich people can invest in appreciating assets (growth stocks, real estate, etc.) while people in the middle class or lower class are hurt by rising prices in food and energy (a significant portion of their monthly expenses). Most Americans are hurt because wages never rise as fast as inflation. Ultimately, inflation makes income inequality even worse.

### **Biblical View on Money and Inflation**

Debt is one of the reasons for the increasing money supply that is causing inflation. The Bible has quite a bit to say about money, and a significant part of these financial warnings concern debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender." When you borrow money and put yourself in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you. The government is spending more than it is bringing in through revenue. The national debt is increasing every day.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives." The printing of more money has no end in sight. The federal government has been borrowing money from US citizens, foreign governments, and the Federal Reserve. Will we ever repay our debt? Even if we do so, it will be with devalued dollars.

The Bible teaches that individuals (and governments) should have honest weights and measures. Deuteronomy 25:13 says, "You

shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small” Proverbs 20:10 warns that “Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord.” Ezekiel 45:10 says, “You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath.”

How should Christians respond to rising inflation? We should begin by paying our debts. We cannot honestly call for the government to live within its means if we won’t set the example and live within our means. We should, “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your harvest; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10).

We should also make wise investments. We should begin by diversifying. Solomon gives this investment advice: “Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth” (Ecclesiastes 11:2). It makes sense to diversify your portfolio since no human being can accurately and consistently predict the future (James 4:13-15). By diversifying your investments, you minimize the risk to your entire portfolio.

We are heading for economic uncertainty. That is why we need to trust the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9) and be good stewards of the resources God has provided to us (1 Corinthians 4:2).

### **Additional Resources**

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt*, 2021

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Money*, 2020

Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics*, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2016.

Bitcoin and Bible Group, chapter three: Inflation, *Thank God for Bitcoin*, Whispering Candle, 2020.

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

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

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

## American Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

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

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

internet, or some other source is:

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

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

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

4. People attracted to same sex relationships are:

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

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

## Sex Among Unmarried People

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

his heart.”[{1}](#)

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

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

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

Looking across other religious affiliations, we see that the vast majority said they Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with this statement[{2}](#). They generally believe that sex outside of marriage by unmarried people is not an issue. This is particularly true of the Unaffiliated with close to 90% (nine out of ten) disagreeing.

How have these views changed among born again young adult individuals over the last decade? Looking at the GSS survey from 2008, we find that over one in three (37%) Born Again



Christians ages 18 through 29 agree with the statement, “If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, I think it is always wrong.” Now in 2020, we find that over one quarter (27%) of Born Again Christians agree that it is always wrong. Although the questions asked were not identical, they are close enough to indicate that the drop of ten percentage points is a significant decline in young adult, Born Again Christians who take a biblical position on sexual activity outside of marriage.

## **Pornography.**



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

The results are shown in Figure 2. Once again, we see that Born Again Protestants are much more likely to say that we should avoid exposure to such material. Both the younger group and the older have more than 50% who say it is “to be avoided.” However, the data also shows over four out of ten Born Again Protestants believe it is usually okay. Given what we know about the negative effects of [pornography](#) on healthy living and relationships, this result is surprising.

All the other religious affiliations have only a small percentage of people who think that explicit sexual material should be avoided. Only about one in five Other Protestants and Catholics affirm that pornography is to be avoided. Once

again, the Unaffiliated lag those affiliated with some religion having only about one in twenty (5%) that think pornography should be avoided.

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

## **Living Together Before Marriage**

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


✖ The third question examines views on whether it is a good thing to live together in a sexual relationship before committing to marriage. The results are summarized in Figure 3. This is another question where Born Again Protestants show a significant difference based on age. The older group, 40 through 55, shows almost 60% who say that it should be avoided as instructed by God. The younger group, 18 through 29, shows only 40% with the same viewpoint. Across all age ranges only about one half of Born Again Protestants say that this practice should be avoided. So, even among this group, over half believe that it is okay and might be helpful.

Once again, this question reveals a stark difference between

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

### **Same Sex Relationships.**

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

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

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

The results for this question are summarized in Figure 4. As

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

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

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

### **Combining Questions for Born Again Protestants.**

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

☒ Clearly, ones in the older group are more likely to take a biblical view on sexual behavior. In fact, on the far right, we see that those 40 to 55 are twice as likely as those 18 to 29 to hold to a biblical view. However, more important, is that over 80% of the younger ages and over 75% of the oldest ages do not hold to a biblical view on these combined topics regarding sexual behavior.

To understand how disturbing these results should be, consider **Born Again Christians with a biblical view on sexuality as a percentage of the entire United States population. The results**

**are 2% for 18 through 29, 3% for 30 through 39, and a whopping 6% for 40 through 55.** In other words, a slim remnant of adults in America hold to a biblical view of sexuality. A secular view promoting no relationship between sexual behavior and marriage and no limits on satisfying one's lusts currently dominates our national thinking.

### **Don't Do What You Say You Will Do.**

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

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

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

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

*Although we can't be certain, it appears that many Born Again Protestant young adults either don't know what topics are covered under moral choices OR they don't know what biblical principles teach OR both. Clearly, almost half of Born Again Protestant young adults think that they are choosing to think biblically about moral choices, but most of them are not living the way they think they are.*

### **Responding to These Results on Sexual Attitudes**

All of the results presented above show that a large majority of young adult, Born Again Protestants do not adhere to a

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

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

## **American Attitudes Concerning Science and Religion**

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

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


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

religion.

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

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

4. Abandon your religion as being false.

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

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

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

At the same time, those who selected a view that ignores

science all together (answer 1) were a small minority as well. Less than one in five (20%) of the Born Again Protestants and slightly over one out of ten for the other religious groups.

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

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

1. Using the Bible alone with no regard for the findings of science.
2. Using science to better understand what the Bible teaches us about origins.
3. Not sure
4. Accepting a completely naturalistic view, i.e. no intelligence involved in the process.

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

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

Conversely, only the Unaffiliated show more than three out of




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

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

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

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

First note that if we strictly define real scientists as  individuals meeting these qualifications—1) a Ph.D. in a scientific field, 2) actively involved in the field, and 3) published in reputable scientific journals—we will find many scientists who agree that there are other sources of truth outside of science. So, we can say with confidence that **the statement in question #3 is objectively, verifiably not true**. However, there are certainly some believers in scientism [the belief that science is the only way to know ultimate truth] who claim the statement is true. They accomplish this trick by claiming that anyone who does not believe that science is the only source of real truth cannot by definition be a real scientist.[\[4\]](#) In other words, they use circular reasoning.

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

We would like to see the answer: Strongly Disagree. This answer aligns with the objective truth discussed above. But

what we find is that only one out of five (20%) of Born Again Protestants profess this view. Among Other Protestants and Catholics only about one out of twenty (5%) profess this view. Adding some uncertainty by adding those who say they Disagree, increases those amounts to two out of five (40%) for Born Again Protestants and one out of five (20%) for Other Protestants and Catholics.

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

### Combining the Questions


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

The results from this comparison are shown in the adjacent figure. The first thing to notice is that the percentage of Born Again Protestants who take a more fundamental position, i.e. science should be ignored as a source of information, is low for one question and goes down to only a few percentage points when all three questions are combined.

The right hand side of the chart considers all combinations of answers that reflect a commitment to biblical truth above current scientific theories combined with a willingness to

consider what science has to offer. As shown, the combination of the first two questions has a large percent of Born Again Protestants, ranging from 55% for the youngest age group and growing to over 65% for the older age group. Since only a minority of Born Again Protestants stated Strongly Disagree that all scientists are adherents of scientism, when we add that question to the mix on the far right, we see less than one in five take a Biblical position on all three.

### **Effect of a Basic Biblical Worldview.**

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

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

### **Responding to These Results on Science and Religion**

As we can see from the first two science questions above, the majority of Americans do not buy into the idea that the only real source of truth is science. They don't believe that scientific positions automatically take precedence over their religious beliefs. Perhaps one factor supporting this stance is an understanding that scientific hypotheses and positions have changed fairly often over the years, particularly in the areas of the origin of life and the role of evolutionary processes on our current bounty of life forms. Certainly, it is not the public school system which has attempted to promote

concepts which current day scientists studying the field do not support.

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

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

### Notes

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

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# 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.

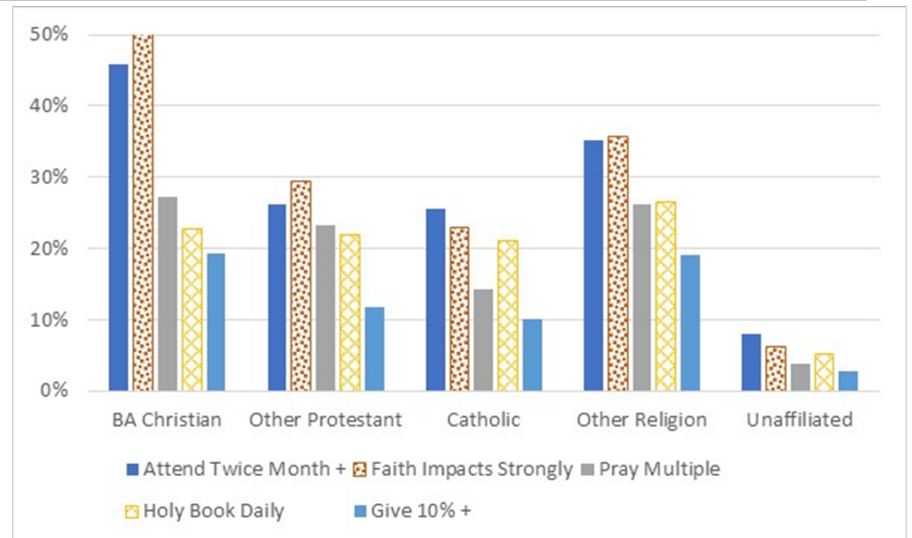
**Table 1 Defining Levels of Religious Activity**

Religious Activity	Nominal Level	Committed Level
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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*



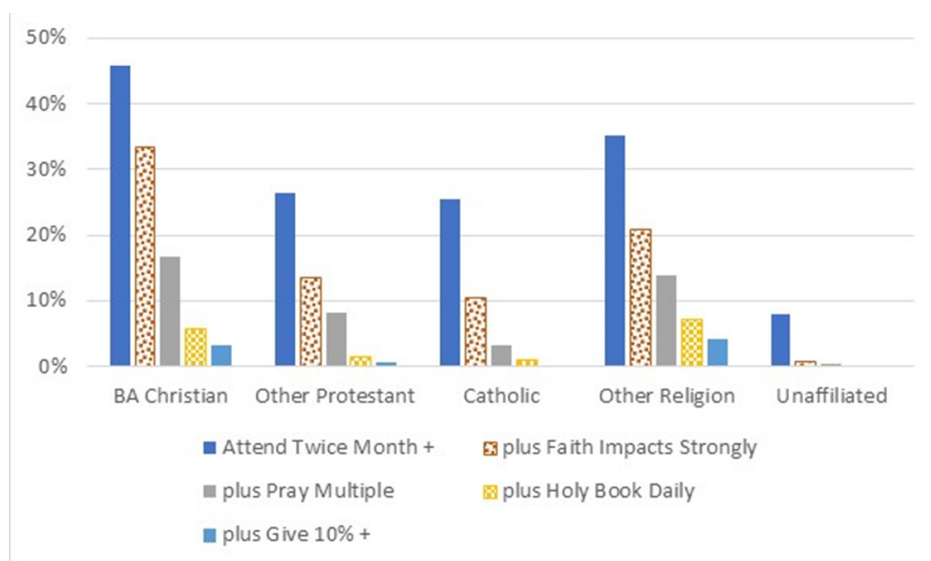
## Committed Level of Religious Activity

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.

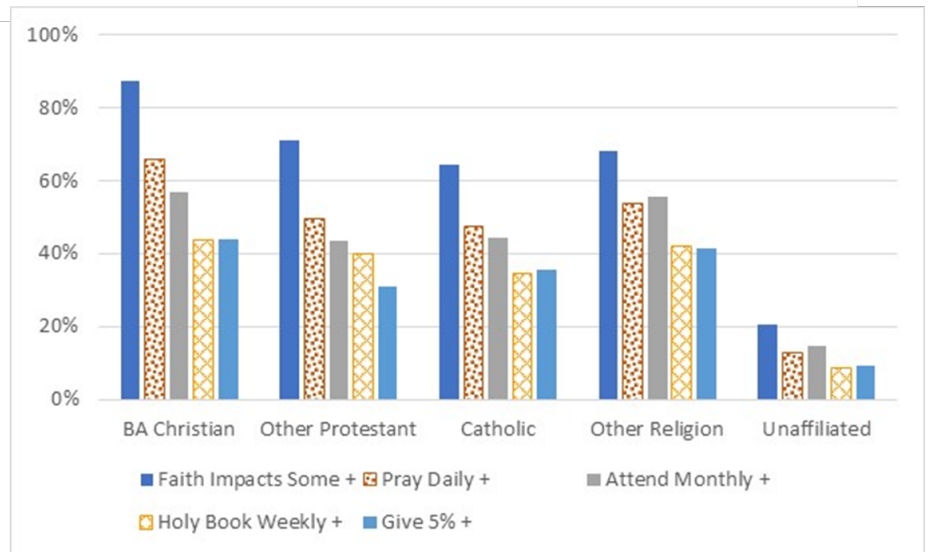
Also note that the entire Unaffiliated group reports less than 8% on each of these practices and less than 1% who claim to do even two of these practices.

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



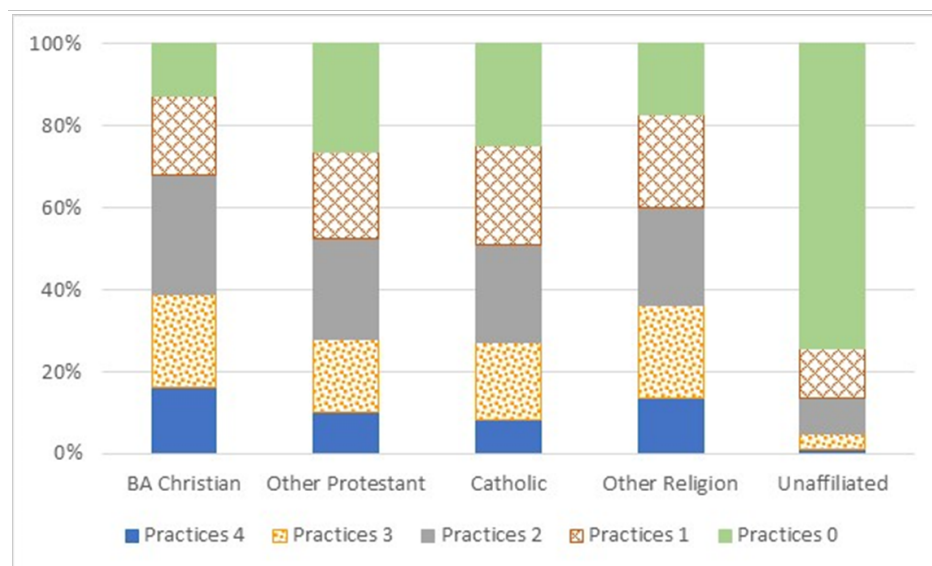
Now let's look at those with at least a Nominal level of religious practice (i.e., those who select the nominal level or the committed level). As shown in the figure, this is a much lower bar with all religious faiths hovering over 60% on those who agree/strongly agree that their faith has a significant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

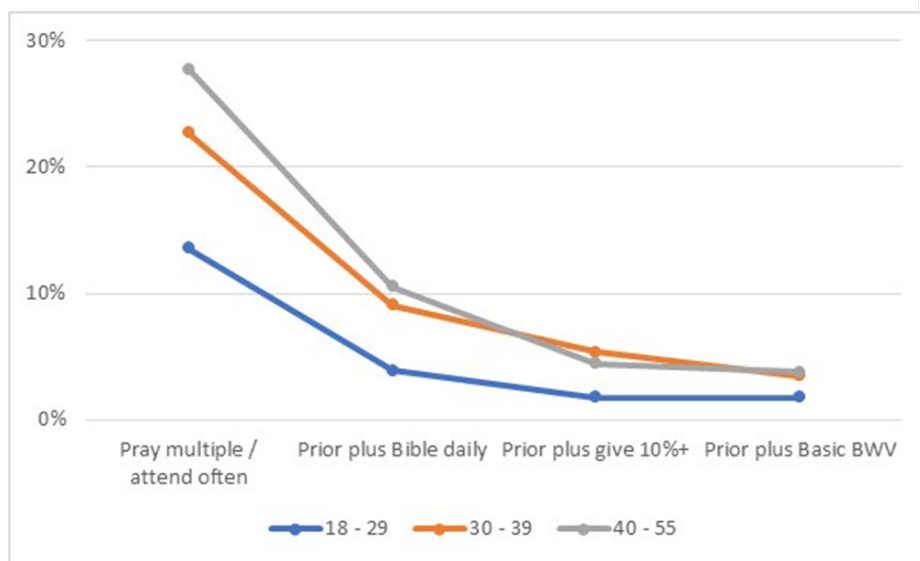
It is worth noting that Other Protestants and Catholics do not lag far behind Born Again Christians in the percentage doing at least three of the activities. This difference is a significant contrast to the Basic Biblical Worldview questions and the "who is Jesus" questions where these other religious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

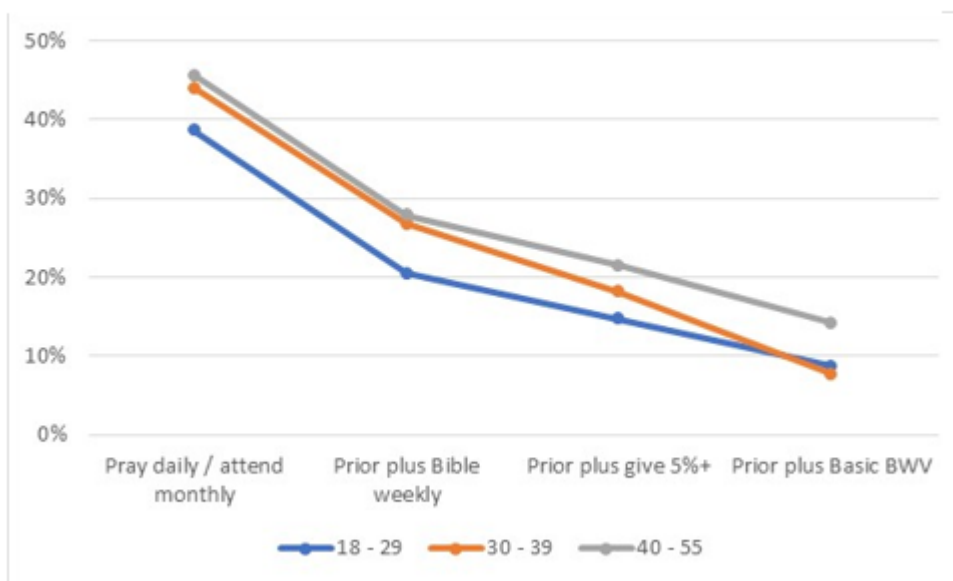
*Figure 5 Committed Level of Religious Activity for Born Again Christians by Age Range*



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.

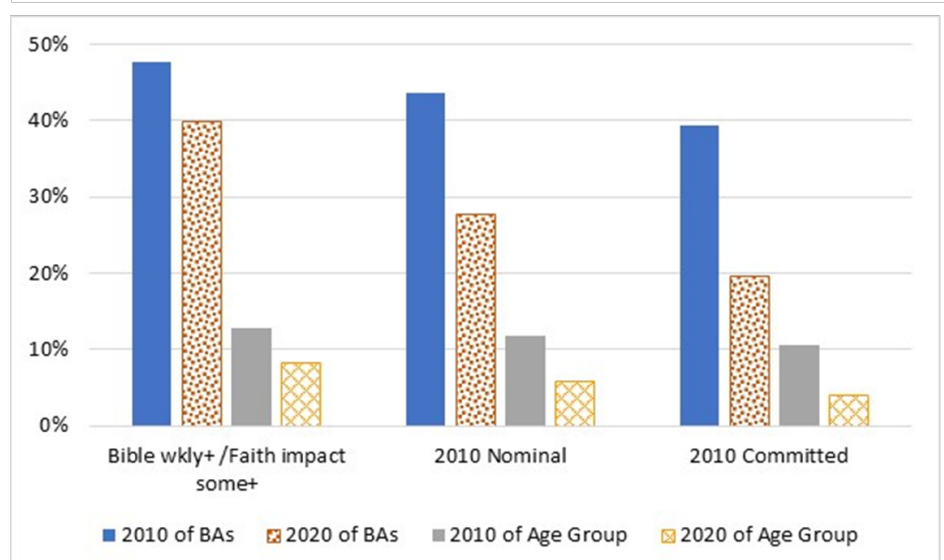
*Figure 6 At Least a Nominal Level of Religious Activity for Born Again Christians by Age Range*



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.

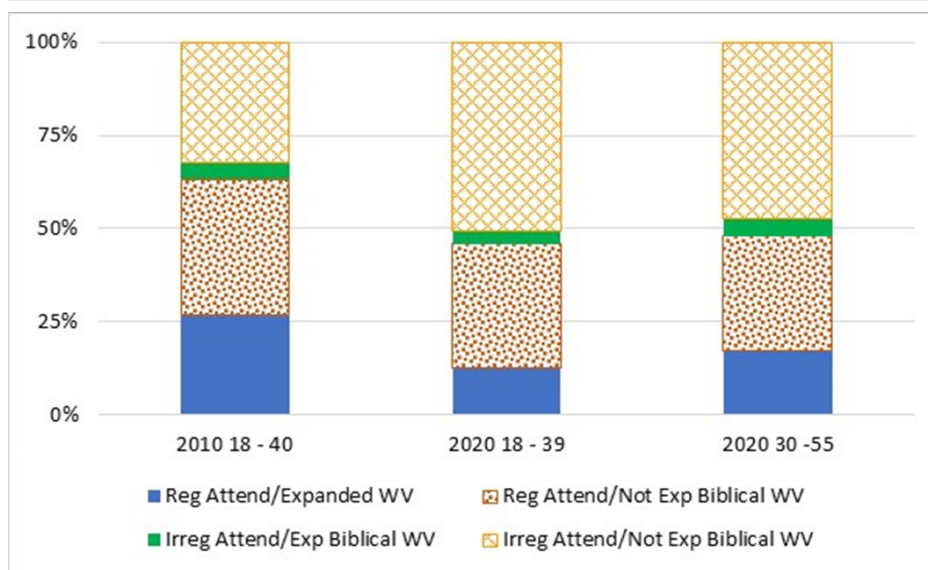
**Combining Worldview and Church Attendance** (a key metric from our earlier book[\[1\]](#))

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.

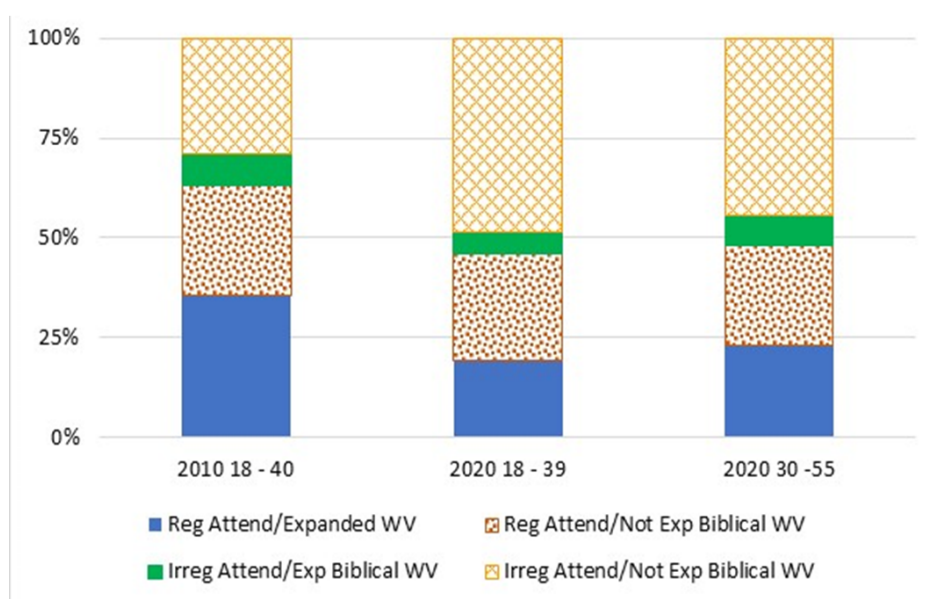
Looking at those with regular attendance and an Expanded Biblical Worldview we see a significant reduction among 18- to 29-year-olds in 2020 (27% down to 13%) with a lesser reduction among 30- to 55-year-olds down to 17%. The percentage of regular attenders without an Expanded Biblical Worldview has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

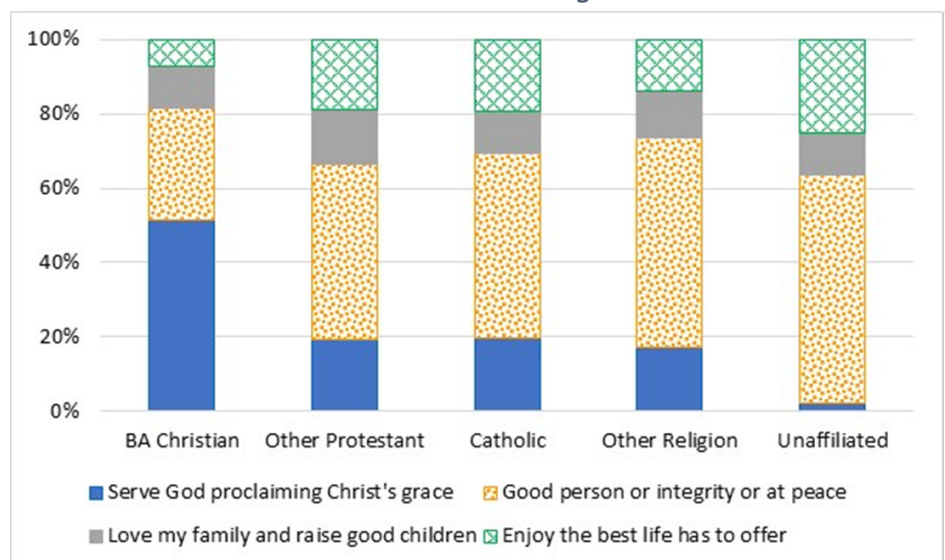
5. To enjoy the best life has to offer, e.g. success, money, travel.

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.

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.

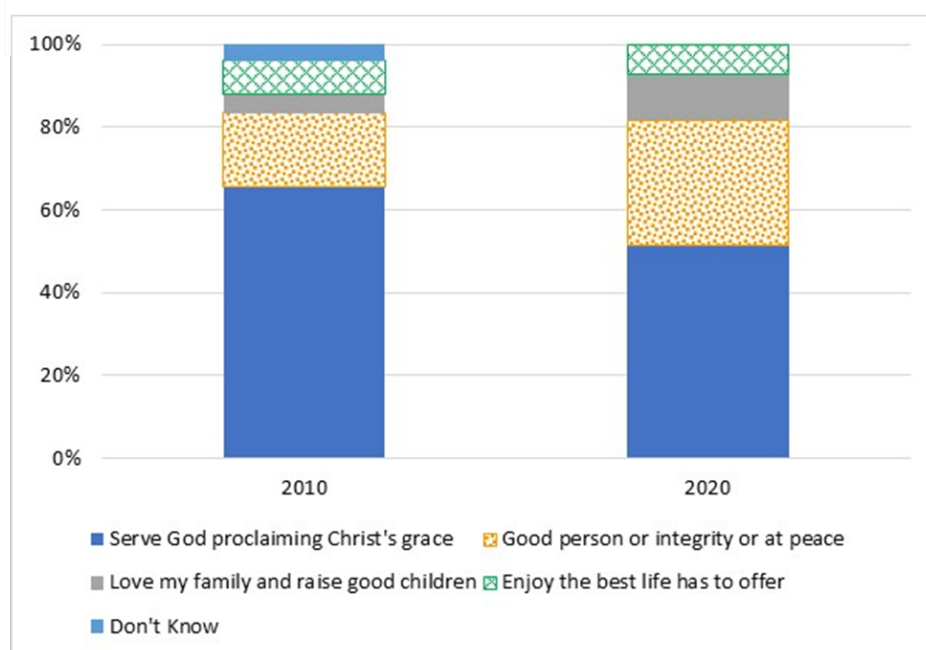
*Figure 24 My Ultimate Purpose for Living  
Americans 18 through 39*



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?

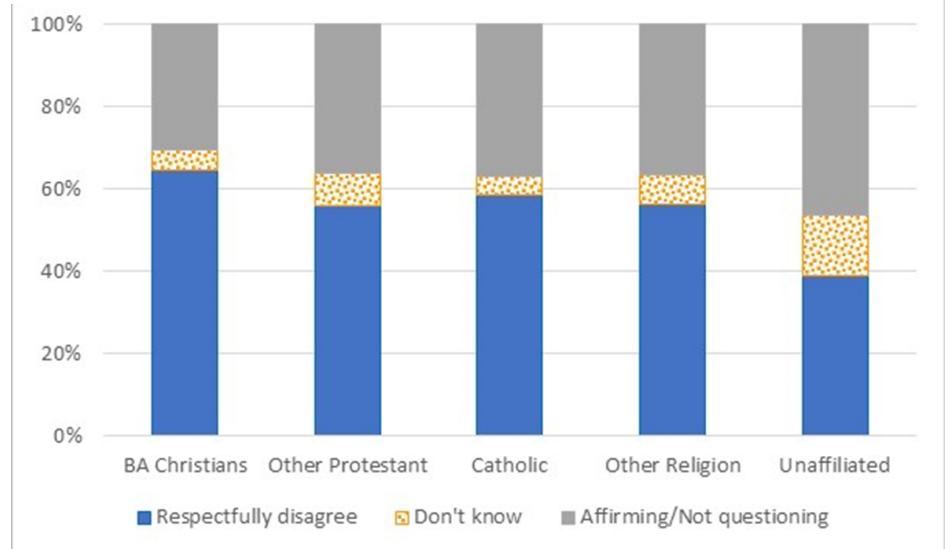
To explore this question, we asked two different questions dealing with how to treat those who have a different religious viewpoint. The first question we asked on this topic is “What does Tolerance mean to you?” The respondents chose from four possible answers:

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

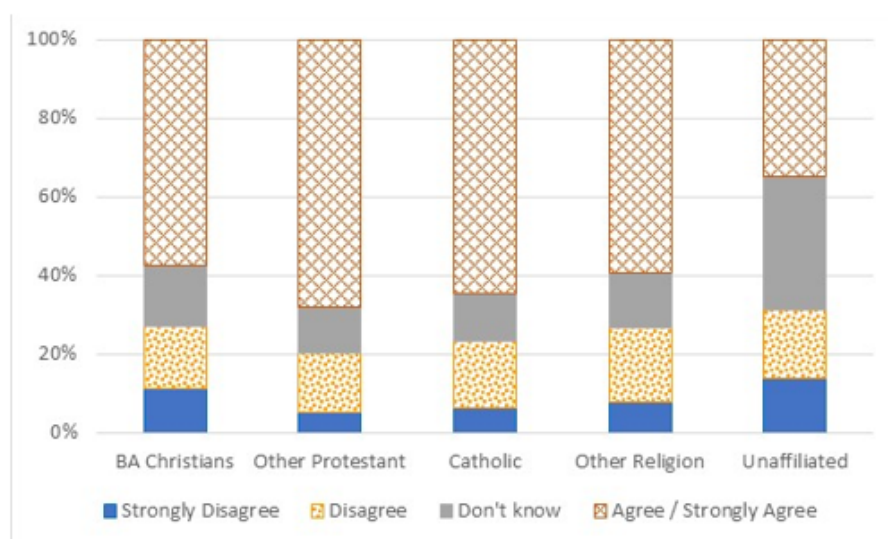
In figure 1, we see how the definitions are distributed. Almost two thirds (65%) of young adult, Born Again Christians selected a classic definition of tolerance.



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 \(collinsdictionary.com\)](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/en/english-american/dictionary/tolerance)

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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<sup>{1}</sup>, was limited to Born Again Americans' ages 18 through 40. This survey of 817 people was focused on 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<sup>{2}</sup>, 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<sup>{3}</sup>. 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<sup>{4}</sup> 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)<sup>{5}</sup> 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<sup>{6}</sup> 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**

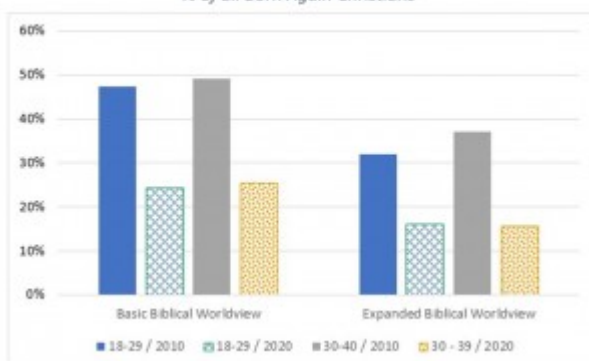
5. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**
6. Some people believe there are moral truths (such as murder is always wrong) that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Others believe that moral truth always depends upon circumstances. Do you believe 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.<sup>{10}</sup> 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.

Figure 5 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years  
% of all Born Again Christians



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

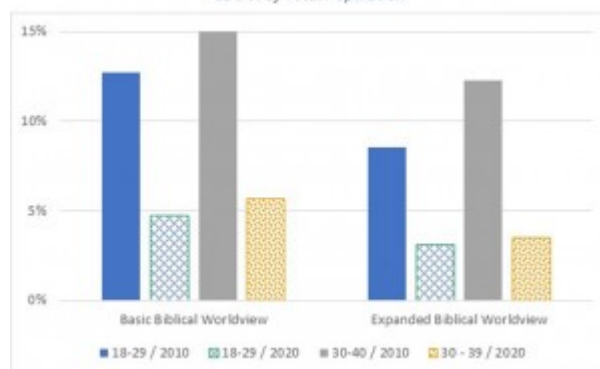
Basic Biblical Worldview and the Expanded Biblical Worldview.

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

Figure 6 Born Again Christian Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years as a % of Total Population



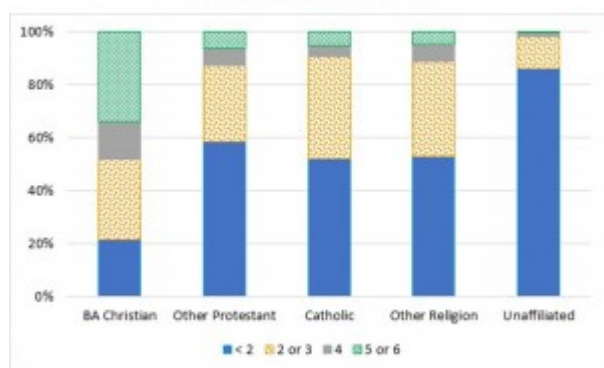
shown in Figure 6. Once again, comparing the 18–29 age group from 2010 with the same age group ten years later now 30–39, we find an even greater drop off. For the Basic Biblical Worldview, we see a drop off from 13% of the population down to 6%. For the Expanded Biblical Worldview, the decline is from 9% down to just over 3% (a drop off of two thirds).

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

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

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

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



Rather than look at the two biblical worldview levels discussed above, we will look at how many of the six biblical worldview questions they answered were consistent with a biblical worldview. In the chart, we look at 18- to 39-year-old individuals grouped by

religious affiliation and map what portion answered less than two of the questions biblically, two or three, four, or more than four (i.e., five or six).

You can see that there are three distinct patterns. First, Born Again Christians where almost half of them answered four or more questions from a biblical perspective (the top two sections of each bar). Then, we see Other Protestants, Catholics<sup>{12}</sup>, and Other Religions<sup>{13}</sup> 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](http://www.probe.org), is an excellent place to explore the topic.<sup>{14}</sup>

## 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](http://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](http://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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# A Christian Worldview

# Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

*Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.*

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.



Some believe that the phrase "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms" creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the "individual right theory,"<sup>{1}</sup> that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase "a well-regulated Militia" means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state's right of self-defense. This view is called the "collective rights theory."<sup>{2}</sup>

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, "The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms."[\[3\]](#) Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, "Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States."[\[4\]](#)

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

## **The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?**

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it

was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms." [\[5\]](#)

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." [\[6\]](#) However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

# The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual’s right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the “individual rights theory” of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person’s rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs, etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person’s right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose

any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court's position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

## **The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?**

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.



# The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey&mdash; a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus' day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead.[\[7\]](#) Peter was carrying his sword in the

garden when Jesus was arrested.{8} While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a “sword control” campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government “of the people, by the people and for the people,” while we wait for Christ’s bodily return.

## Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, [www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second\\_amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment)

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceeding in the Cnvention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*

4. Ibid., Noah Webster, “An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution.” *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.

5. Ibid., James Madison, “Paper 46,” *The Federalist Papers*.

6. Romans 13:4

7. Luke 22:35-38

# Social Media

*Kerby Anderson assesses how social media's influence is changing our brains and the way we think. He also provides an overview of censorship within social media.*

The influence of social media in our society has increased dramatically in the last decade. This leads to two very important questions. First, how are the various forms of social media and these digital devices affecting us? Second, should we respond to the documented examples of censorship on these social media platforms?

## Social Media Influence

More than a decade ago, social scientists and social commentators expressed concern about how the Internet in general and social media in particular was influencing us. Nicholas Carr raised this question in an *Atlantic* article entitled "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" He observed that "Over the past few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory." He believed this came from using the Internet and searching the web with Google.

He later went on to write a book with the arresting title, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. He surveyed brain research that helped to explain why we don't read as much and why it is so hard to concentrate. The

Internet and social media are retraining our brains. He says, "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski."

A developmental psychologist at Tufts University put it this way. "We are not only what we read. We are how we read." The style of reading on the Internet puts "efficiency" and "immediacy" above other factors. Put simply, it has changed the way we read and acquire information.

You might say that would only be true for the younger generation. Older people are set in their ways. The Internet could not possibly change the way the brains of older people download information. Not true. The 100 billion neurons inside our skulls can break connections and form others. A neuroscientist at George Mason University says: "The brain has the ability to reprogram itself on the fly, altering the way it functions."

The proliferation of social media has also begun to shorten our time of concentration. Steven Kotler made this case in his *Psychology Today* blog, "How Twitter Makes You Stupid." He once asked the author of the best-selling book why he called it the "8 Minute Meditation." The author told him that eight minutes was the length of time of an average segment of television. He reasoned that "most of us already know exactly how to pay attention for eight minutes."

Steven Kotler argues that Twitter was reducing the time of concentration to 140 words (back when that was the word limit). He showed how Twitter was constantly tuning "the brain to reading and comprehending information 140 characters at a time." He concluded that "[I]f you take a Twitter-addicted teen and give them a reading comprehension test, their comprehension levels will plunge once they pass the 140 word mark."

Not only is there a problem with concentration; there is a

problem with distraction. A study at the University of Illinois found that if an interruption takes place at a natural breakpoint, then the mental disruption is less. If it came at a less opportune time, the user experienced the “where was I?” brain lock.

Another problem is what is called “continuous partial attention.” People who use mobile devices often use their devices while they should be paying attention to something else. Psychologists tell us that we really aren’t multitasking, but rather engage in rapid-fire switching of attention among tasks. It is inevitable they are going to miss key information if part of their focus is on their digital devices.

There is also the concern that social media and digital devices are reducing our creativity. Turning on a digital device and checking social media when you are “doing nothing” replaces what we used to do in the days before these devices were invented. Back then, we called it “daydreaming.” That is when the brain often connects unrelated facts and thoughts. You have probably had some of your most creative ideas while shaving, putting on makeup, or driving. That is when your brain can be creative. Checking e-mail and social media sites reduces daydreaming.

These new media platforms present a challenge to us as Christians. As we use these new forms of media, we should always be aware of their influence on us. They can easily conform us to the world (Romans 12:2). Therefore, we should make sure that we are not taken captive (Colossians 2:8) by the false philosophies of the world.

Christians should strive to apply the principle set forth in Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about

these things.”

A wise Christian will use discernment when approaching the various social media platforms. They provide lots of information and connect us with people around the world. But we should also guard against the worldly influence that is also promoted on many of these platforms.

## **Social Media Censorship**

Big Tech companies have been censoring content for many years. Many years ago, the National Religious Broadcasters began monitoring censorship on these social media platforms through their John Milton Project for Religious Free Speech. Even back then, their report concluded that “The free speech liberty of citizens who use the Internet is nearing a crisis point.”

A recent Senate hearing provided lots of additional examples. Senator Marsha Blackburn asked why her pro-life ad was pulled during the 2018 campaign because Twitter deemed it “inflammatory.” It is worth noting that she did receive an apology from the executive who added that they made a “mistake on your ad.” Senator Ted Cruz pointed to a Susan B. Anthony List ad that was banned. It had a picture of Mother Teresa with her quote: “Abortion is profoundly anti-woman.” At the top of the poster in the committee room was the word: CENSORED.

A number of commentators (Laura Loomer, Milo Yiannopoulos, Alex Jones) have been banned from Facebook and Instagram. Steven Crowder’s YouTube channel has been demonetized. Nearly two-dozen PragerU videos have been slapped with a restricted label on YouTube. The list goes on and on.

Big tech does control much of the media world. Google controls 90% of worldwide search, 75% of smartphone operating systems, 67% of desktop browser, and 37% of digital advertising. Add to this other platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube that

also have a profound influence. At the Senate hearing, Ted Cruz noted that these big tech companies “are larger and more powerful than Standard Oil was when it was broken up” and “larger and more powerful than AT&T when it was broken up.” But does that mean government should get involved?

Those who are advocating government intervention make the case that “platform access is a civil right.” The argument is that private companies are actually violating the civil rights of Americans in the same way that preventing someone to speak in a public park would be a violation. They argue that the big tech companies are a monopoly. And they call for federal and state regulation of these social media platforms arguing that the Supreme Court has argued in the past that government cannot restrict your access to the public square.

The problem with that argument is two-fold. First, these big tech companies are private companies not the government. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms are private property and not the public square. We may not always like what they do, but they are privately owned technology companies and not the federal government, which is governed by the First Amendment.

Second, these companies are protected by a section of the 1996 Communications Decency Act that keeps them from being exposed to potentially crippling liability for something posted on their platform. Some politicians have called for changing that legal protection, but Congress seems unlikely to do anything like that in the near future.

Many conservatives are wary of having the government get involved in patrolling social media platforms. They remind us of the 1949 FCC Fairness Doctrine. This regulation was supposed to provide an opportunity for media outlets to provide content that was fair, honest, and balanced. Talk radio and other forms of media exploded once the Fairness Doctrine was removed. In most cases, government regulation of

the media hurt conservative voices more than helped them.

Even if government were to regulate content on social media platforms, it is worth mentioning that the major tech companies would probably have lots of influence. Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg would have a place at the table as government drafted various media regulations. It is likely that company and many others might even help craft regulations that would protect them from future competitors. We have seen this picture before in other instances when government intervened.

Some have even suggested that we close our social media accounts. If you don't like the way the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* reports stories or provides commentary from people on your side, you don't have to subscribe to those newspapers. If you don't like how MSNBC or Fox News covers stories, you don't have to tune to that TV network. Media outlets are already choosing what to print or broadcast. Social media platforms are no different.

Sam Sweeney has this advice: "Delete your Facebook, yesterday. Don't get your news from Twitter. The issues of free speech on social media will no longer matter to you. They don't matter to me. I've made a decision not to subjugate myself to the whims of our new overloads."

I think most of us want to keep our social media accounts because of the benefit we receive. But I also realize that in light of what we have discussed in this article, many will decide to follow his advice and drop one or more of these social media accounts. We leave that decision to you.

### *Additional Resources*

Kerby Anderson, *Arts, Media, and Culture* (Cambridge, OH: Christian House Publishing, 2016).

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David French, "Social-Media Censorship is the Product of Culture and Commerce," *National Review*, 6 June 2019.

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Jessica Melugin, "Conservative who want Facebook, other social media regulated should think twice," *Foxnews.com*, 11 June 2019.

Sam Sweeney, "Close Your Social-Media Accounts," *National Review*, 10 June 2019.

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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. Nietzsche 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/](https://blogs.bible.org/what-is-art-anyway/)  
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