

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.

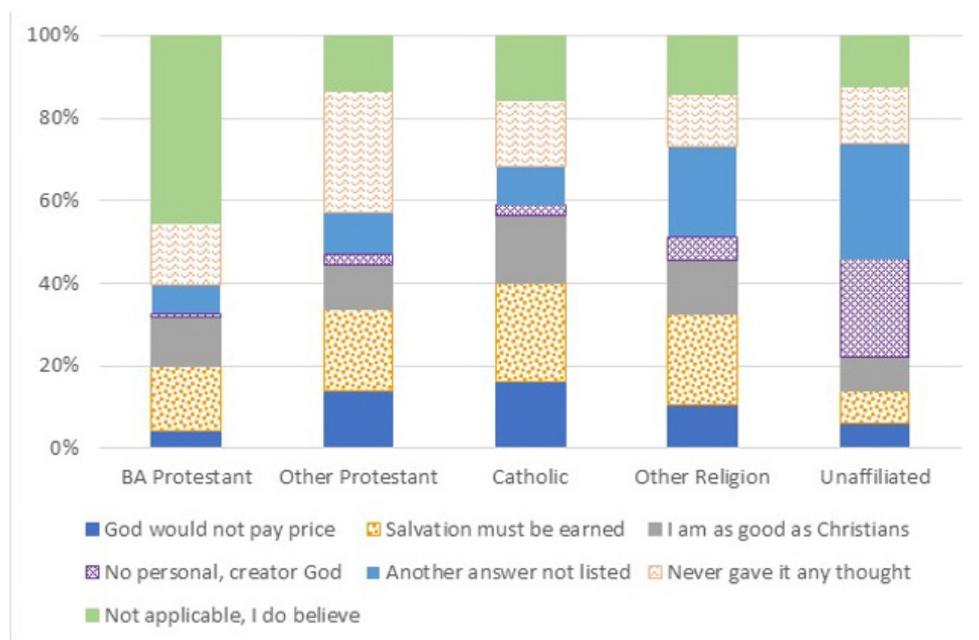
Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

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



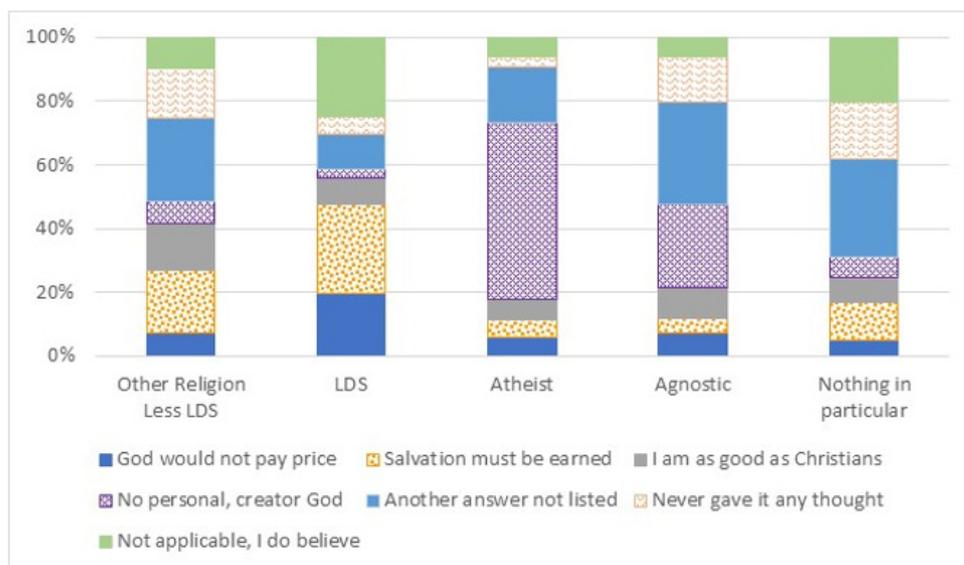
First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in [Report #4](#). But in the current

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.”

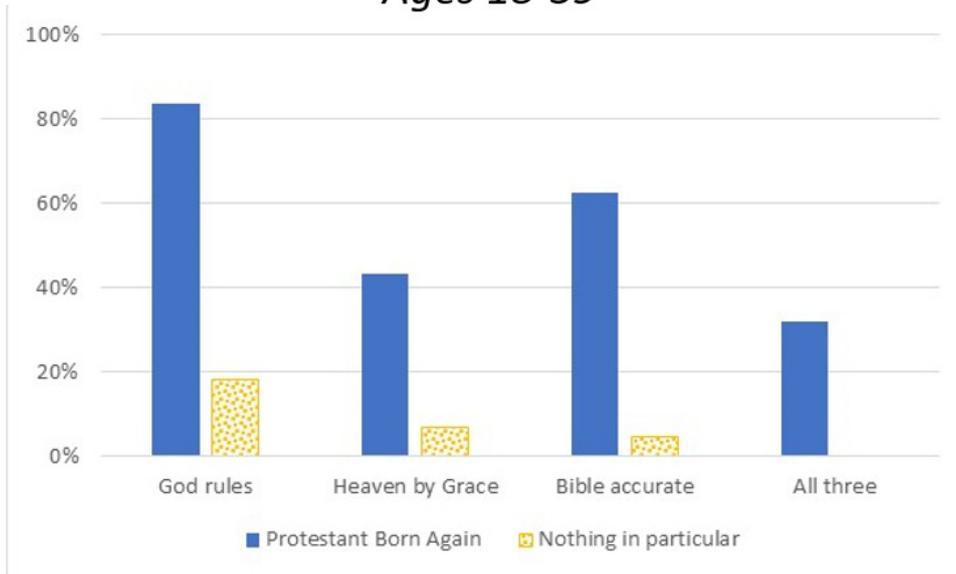
So, there are about one fifth of the NIPs who might have a somewhat Christian view of salvation. However, less than 3% of this group claim to be born-again. And of course, four fifths of this group say they do not believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So, an overwhelming majority of the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

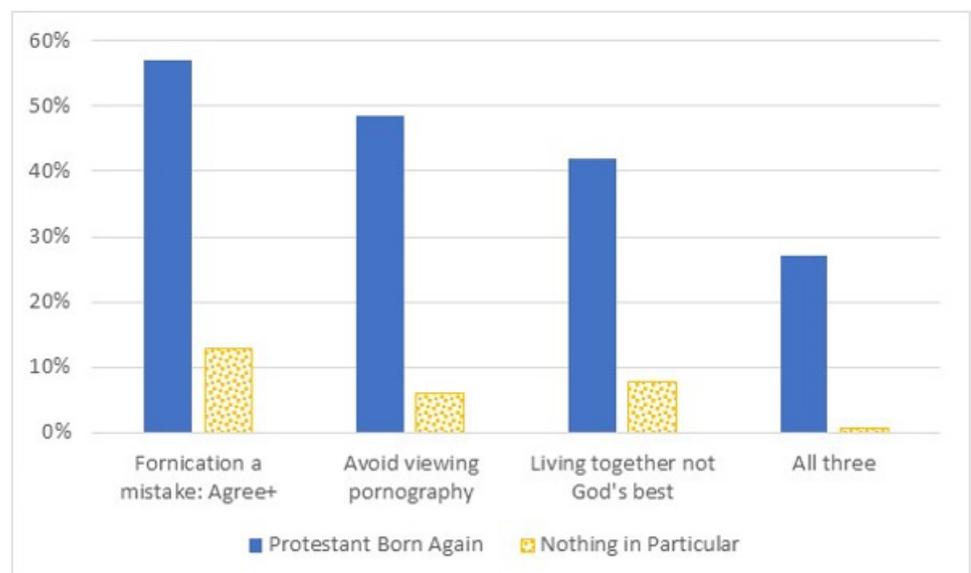
- **a. To be avoided**
 - b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
 - c. A matter of personal choice
 - d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
 - e. Don't know
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
- a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with 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](#)"^{4} which can be found on the Probe website.

Notes

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

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

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

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

© 2022 Probe Ministries

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

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

Our 2020 survey reveals a striking decline in evangelical religious beliefs and practices over the last ten years. In our first article, we saw a significant degradation in the percentage of American young adults who are born again^{1} and profess a biblically informed worldview^{2}. Perhaps a biblical worldview, as defined by the set of questions we used, is not an accurate gauge of an orthodox Christian belief.

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

1. Do you believe in some critical aspects of Jesus Christ and His time on earth?
2. Do you believe that Jesus was right in saying “No one comes to the Father except by Me”?

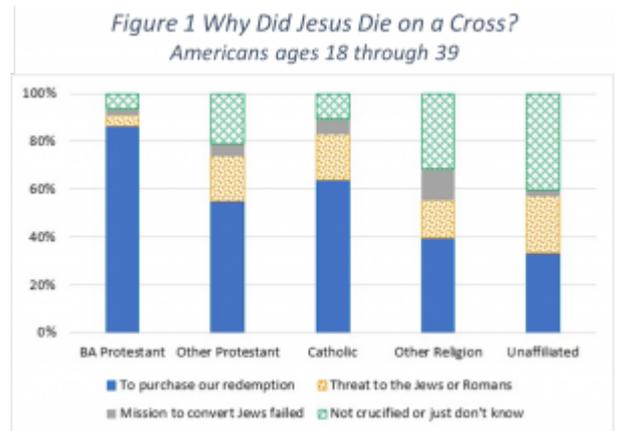
We will look at these two areas alone and then see how those with a biblical worldview align with these questions.

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

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

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

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



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

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

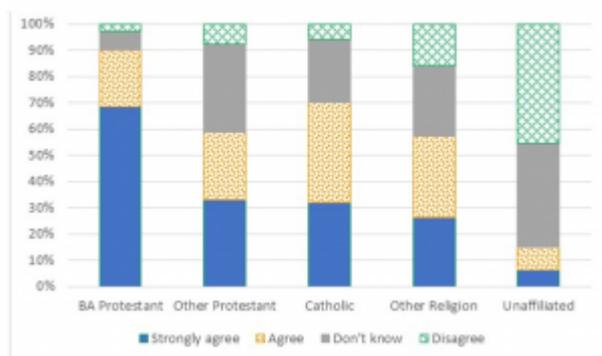
The second question is:

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

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

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

*Figure 2 Jesus Will Return to Save Us
Americans Ages 18 through 39*



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

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

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

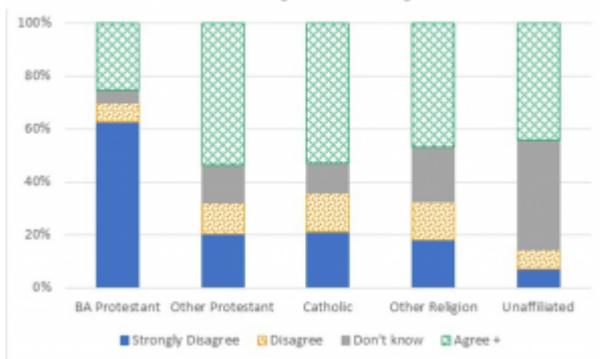
The third question (also used for determining a Basic Biblical Worldview) is:

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

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

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

*Figure 3 Jesus Committed Sins Like Other People
Americans Ages 18 through 39*

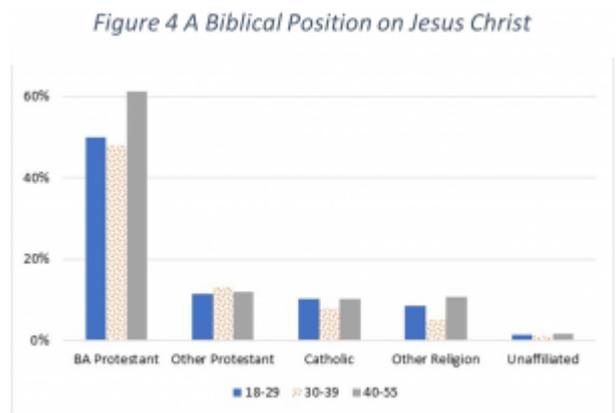


Young adult American beliefs about this statement follow a similar pattern as the first two questions. Once again, about one third of Born Again Protestants either Don't Know or Agree with this statement. Having this large a number of Born Again Protestants who don't accept a primary belief of Biblical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

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

Accepting a Doctrinally Consistent Set of Beliefs

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



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

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

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

Topic 2: Are there multiple ways to

heaven?

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

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

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

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

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

about the following two statements:

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

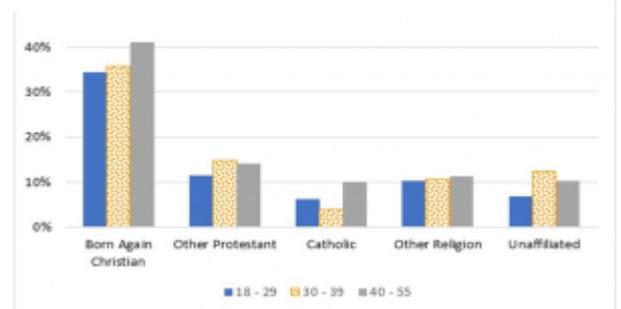
2. I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ. **Answers from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly**

Who Believes in Multiple Ways to God

First let's look at just question number one across the various religious groups, looking for the answer **Disagree strongly** as shown in Figure 5{3}.

If someone disagrees with this statement, they could be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist, etc. The first thing you may notice is that all religious groups other than Born Again Christian all congregate around 5% to 15%. So, for all these groups, around one in ten people take a strong non-pluralistic view. Or turning it around, about 9 out of 10 of them are pluralists.

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



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

Who Believes Jesus is the Only Way

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

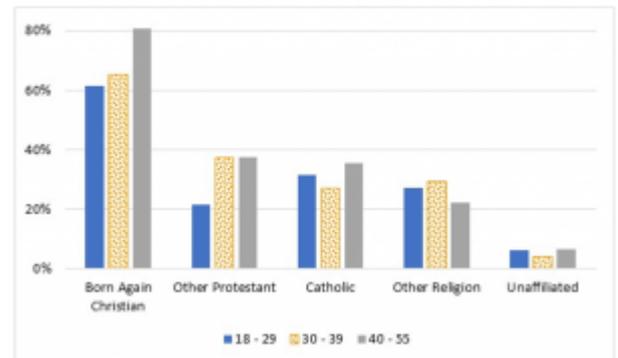
subset of the people who disagreed strongly with the question above, “Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God.”

Instead, we asked this second question in a slightly different way but with the same intent: “I believe that the only way to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ.” We thought that this question would be

equivalent to the first one in the prior paragraph. But as we will see, people’s brains allow them to give answers that contradict each other.

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

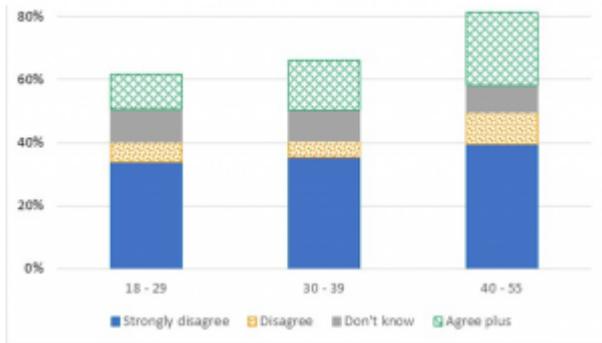
Figure 6 Jesus is the Only Way to a True Relationship with God



An Inconsistent Worldview Among Many Born Again Christians

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

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



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

attributable to misreading.

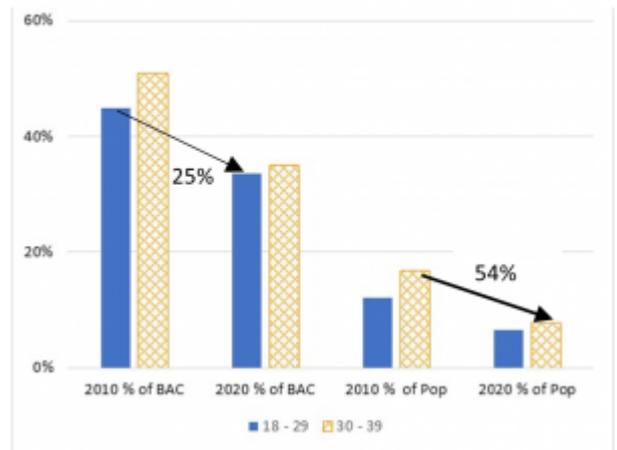
In Figure 7, we look at what the Born Again Christians who stated that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God said when responding to the question about Mohammad, Buddha and Jesus. First note that the total height of each column is the same as the Born Again Christian columns in Figure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

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

Changes over the Last Decade

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

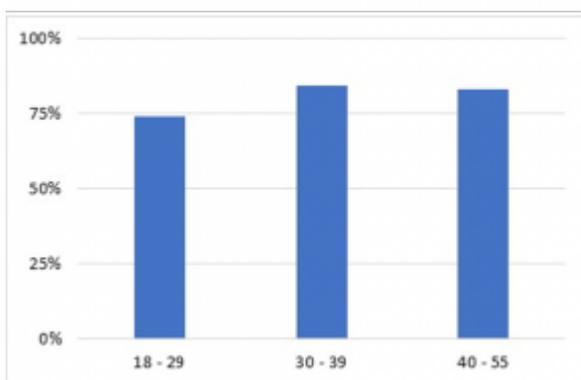
Figure 8 Born Again Christians Who Are Not Pluralists comparing 2010 with 2020



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

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

Figure 9 Born Again Christians with a Basic



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

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

Countering the Negative Slide

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

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

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

- Explain that only someone perfectly sinless could undertake the task of reconciling us before a holy God. Make sure they understand that “God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf in order that we may become the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Explain that only God, in the person of Jesus Christ, could be that sinless sacrifice. God had to undergo the pain and suffering of separating Himself from His Son on the cross. “Though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:6-8
- Explain that the cost was so high, no other way to God is possible for sinful man. No one can come to the Father except through the Son and anyone may come through Him. “God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. A Born Again person in our survey results is someone who 1) has made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and 2) when asked what will happen to you after you die, they answer I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

2. See our first article: Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020 for a description of the biblical worldview questions used.

3. Born Again Christians include Catholics who answered the born again questions to allow comparison with the 2010 survey, but in the Catholic category we include all Catholics including those who are born again. About 20% of Catholics

affirm the two born again questions.

Pew Research on Religious Beliefs of American Christians

Looking across the seven-year period from 2007 to 2014, we find that the percentage of Evangelicals holding a biblical worldview is continuing to decline, and the percentage of Mainline and Catholics holding such a worldview is declining at an even higher rate.

Overall, 13.3% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 27 held a biblical worldview in 2007. By 2014, for the same segment of Americans who are now between the ages of 25 and 34, this number had dropped to 11.5%.

In this post, I continue my exploration of the two large surveys by Pew Research entitled U. S. Religious Landscape Surveys, taken seven years apart (i.e., 2007^{1} and 2014^{2}). In prior posts, I looked at [the growing number of Nothing at All respondents](#) and at [the breakdown of Americans by religious affiliation^{3}](#). Now, I want to look more deeply at the religious beliefs of Evangelicals and Other Christians (i.e., Mainline Protestants and Catholics).

Using these surveys, we can look at five key questions on religious beliefs. The first four questions we will call Basic Doctrine. The questions are:

1. Do you believe in God or a universal spirit? *Absolutely or fairly certain.* Which comes closest to your view of

God? God is a person with whom people can have a relationship and is not an impersonal force.

2. Which comes closest to your view: The Bible is the word of God. (versus the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.)
3. Do you think there is a heaven, where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded? Yes.
4. Do you think there is a hell, where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished? Yes.

Clearly these questions do not express Evangelical doctrine perfectly, but they are worded the way that Pew Research chose to express them and I can't go back and fine tune them.

The fifth question is:

5. When it comes to questions of right and wrong, which of the following do you look to most for guidance?
Religious teachings and beliefs{4}

We will refer to all five questions combined as a Biblical Worldview (BWV).

Let's begin by looking at Evangelicals. In Table 1, the percentages of each age group for both survey years are tabulated.

Table 1 – Christian Beliefs for Evangelicals

Evangelical (All)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18 – 27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Basic Doctrine	59.1%	56.2%	61.1%	53.1%	57.6%
Biblical Worldview	33.6%	33.6%	36.2%	31.7%	39.5%

Note: Those 18-27 in 2007 would be 25-34 in 2014, which is why 2014 is broken up differently than 2007

And we see that the youngest group in each survey tends to be

slightly higher the older respondents in most areas. In 2014, we see a significant dip for those 25 to 34 years of age versus those younger and those older. It also appears that there is a slight uptick in both basic doctrine and BVW belief in 2014 over 2007. However, we need to look at the percentage of the entire age group to get the full picture.

Table 2 – Percentage of an Entire Age Group for Christian Beliefs of Evangelicals

Evangelical (All)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
% of All People in Age Group	28.0%	32.7%	23.8%	26.5%	32.9%
Basic Doctrine	16.6%	18.4%	14.6%	14.1%	19.0%
Biblical Worldview	9.4%	11.0%	8.6%	8.4%	13.0%

Now we see that against the entire population, the percentage of those in 2014 with a Basic Doctrinal view and a Biblical Worldview and younger than 35 is less than the 18–27 year-olds from 2007. They went from higher in Table 1 to lower in Table 2 because of the fairly significant decrease in the percentage of Evangelicals in those age groups. In fact, comparing 18-27 in 2007 with 25-34 in 2014, we find the number affirming Basic Doctrine goes down by 15% and the number affirming a Pew Biblical Worldview goes down 10%.

When you think about it, the results from these two tables are what you would expect to see. Those who were marginal Evangelicals in 2007 were more likely than those with stronger Evangelical beliefs to identify as something other than an Evangelical by 2014. This action would make the percentages in Table 1 go up in 2014. But there was still some reduction in the number of people who believed in Basic Doctrine and a Biblical Worldview in 2014. Thus, the percentages in Table 2 went down a significant amount.

Now let's see how Other Christians (i.e. Non-Evangelicals) compare.

Table 3 – Christian Beliefs for Other Christians

Other Christians (Mainline and Catholic)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Basic Doctrine	32.8%	30.6%	39.0%	30.5%	32.8%
Biblical Worldview	10.5%	11.6%	14.5%	11.1%	16.1%

Comparing Table 3 with Table 1, we see that the percentage of Other Christians holding a Basic Doctrine is just over one half of the rate with Evangelicals. For a Biblical Worldview, it drops to about one third of the rate expressed by Evangelicals. Given that these respondents self-identified with a Mainline Protestant or Catholic denomination, it is disheartening to see that only around 10% of them ascribe to a Biblical Worldview.

Table 4 – Percentage of an Entire Age Group for Christian Beliefs of Other Christians

Other Christian					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Group	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
% of All People in Age Group	36.9%	46.0%	29.5%	28.3%	41.3%
Basic Doctrine	12.1%	14.1%	11.5%	8.7%	13.5%
BWV	3.9%	5.4%	4.3%	3.1%	6.6%

Once again, we see a similar effect when we look at the population as a whole. Given the significant drop in the number of people identifying as Other Christians in 2014 when compared with 2007, we see a large drop (as a percentage) in those professing a Basic Doctrine and a Biblical Worldview. In fact, comparing 18-27 in 2007 with 25-34 in 2014, we find the number affirming Basic Doctrine goes down by 30% and the number affirming a Pew Biblical Worldview goes down 20%.

Perhaps more importantly, we see only about 3–4% of the population under 35 are Mainline/Catholics with a Biblical Worldview.

Impact of Pluralism on a Christian Biblical Worldview

Surprisingly, it appears to be possible to have a pluralistic view (i.e. there are multiple ways to heaven) and have a Biblical Worldview as defined by the questions in the two Pew surveys. Let’s look at the relationship between these two important views. In an earlier blog post, [Measuring Pluralism: A Needed Correction](#), we looked at the number of people who did not take a pluralistic view. In fact, they said,

1. My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life. OR
2. Many religions can lead to eternal life, but only Christian religions can lead to eternal life. (That is: Many Christian religions can lead to eternal life.)

As reported in the earlier post, those who stated either of the items above were as shown below:

Table 5 – Christians Who Are Not Pluralistic

Age Range	Evangelical			Other Christian		
	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Not Pluralistic	60%	54%	59%	27%	27%	25%

What we want to consider in this post is the relationship between one’s view of pluralism and one’s view of basic Christian doctrine.

Table 6 – Probability of Holding Christian Doctrine Given One’s View on Pluralism

Age Range	Evangelical			Other Christian		
	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-24	15-34	35 plus
One True with Basic Doctrine	72.9%	65.3%	66.8%	56.3%	50.5%	52.3%

Pluralist with Basic Doctrine	43.8%	38.6%	44.6%	32.6%	23.2%	26.3%
One True with Biblical Worldview	47.8%	45.1%	50.4%	27.9%	25.3%	30.7%
Pluralist with BWV	19.0%	16.0%	23.9%	9.5%	5.9%	11.2%
Note: One True = Not Pluralistic						

First, let's look at the impact of pluralism on belief in Basic Doctrine as defined above. For Evangelicals who are not pluralistic, we can see that about two out of three hold to the Basic Doctrine. For Other Christians, it drops to about one in two (or 50%). For Evangelicals who are pluralistic we see a drop down to about 40% across all ages. For Other Christians, the drop is down to around 25% which is only half of the percentage of those who are not pluralistic.

However, when we add in the idea of making decisions on what is right or wrong, we see a significant drop. For Evangelicals who are not pluralistic, about one in two (50%) hold to this Biblical Worldview, a drop of about 30%. For Other Christians, we see an even larger drop down to about half of the level for a Basic Doctrine, i.e. down to about 25%.

We see an even greater reduction in comparing those who are pluralistic with those who are not. For Evangelicals, they are about a third as likely (e.g., 16% compared to 45% for those age 25-34) to hold to a Biblical Worldview. For Other Christians, generally less than 10% of those with a pluralistic view hold to a Biblical Worldview, or less than one third of the rate among those who are not pluralistic.

It is most disturbing, but unfortunately true that the percentage of Evangelicals holding a biblical worldview is continuing to decline, and the percentage of Mainline and Catholics holding such a worldview is declining at an even faster rate. This does not bode well for the future of the

church of Jesus Christ in America.

Notes

1. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

2. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

3. **Religious Affiliation of American Emerging Adults: 1996 to 2014**

4. Other choices were Philosophy and reason, Practical experience and common sense, and Scientific information

© 2018 Probe Ministries

Spiritual Warfare – Applying A Biblical Worldview Perspective

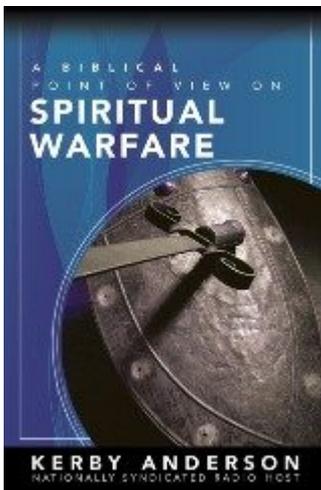
Kerby Anderson provides a concise, biblical worldview perspective on the important topic of spiritual warfare. Every Christian needs to understand that our battle is against spiritual forces not against other humans, who need Christ.

He gives us practical advice on understanding our spiritual weapons and applying them to take on the forces of Satan in this world.



Spiritual Warfare

Lots of books have been written about spiritual warfare. Most of them share anecdotes and experiences of the authors or the people they ministered to. In this article I merely want to answer the question, what is a biblical point of view on spiritual warfare? (For more information on this topic, see Kerby Anderson, [*A Biblical Point of View on Spiritual Warfare*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009).



Spiritual warfare affects everyone. In fact, the day someone becomes a Christian, they are already involved in spiritual warfare. There is no place you can escape from this warfare. There are no “safe zones” or “secure bunkers” where you can hide.

Sadly, many Christians do not even know there is a spiritual war taking place around them. They may even become a spiritual casualty and never understand what has happened to them.

So many Christians have become mortally wounded in the spiritual conflict that takes place around them. They may be so emotionally spent or spiritually dead that they are essentially no longer of any use to God.

Others may have less serious wounds from this spiritual conflict, but are still affected by the battle. They still go about the Christian life but are not as effective as they could be because of the "battle scars" they carry with them.

Jesus never promised that the Christian life would be easy. In fact, He actually warned us of the opposite. He says in John 16:33 that "in this world you will have trouble."

Anyone who takes even a brief look at the history of Christianity knows that is true. Jesus was beaten and crucified. Most of the disciples died martyrs deaths. Millions of Christians were persecuted throughout history.

Christians today suffer persecution in many lands, and all of us wake up to a spiritual battle every day. That is why we need to be prepared for battle.

So where does this battle take place? Actually the Bible teaches that spiritual warfare takes place in various places in heaven and on earth.

First, we should remember that God dwells above in the heavens. Psalm 8:1 says that God has displayed His splendor above the heavens. Psalm 108:4-5 says God's lovingkindness is great above the heavens and that He is exalted above the heavens.

The Bible also talks about the battle in the heavens. When a passage in Scripture talks about heaven, it may be referring to one of three places: (1) The first heaven is what we would call the atmosphere, (2) The second heaven is where the angels fly and do battle (Revelation 12:4-12; 14:6-7), and (3) the third heaven is also called "Paradise" and is what Paul

describes in 2 Corinthians 12: 2-4:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Spiritual warfare also takes place below the heavens and on earth. This occurs on the face of the earth (Genesis 6:1; Acts 17:26) where Satan prowls like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). And it will also take place in hell and the bottomless pit (Revelation 9:1-2; 20:1-3) and at the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10-15) where final judgment will take place.

Spiritual Battles

Spiritual warfare is the spiritual battle that takes place in the unseen, supernatural dimension. Although it is unseen by humans, we can certainly feel its effects. And we are to battle against spiritual forces in a number of ways.

First, we need to realize that the weapons of this warfare are not human weapons fought in the flesh. Instead, they are spiritual weapons such as truth and righteousness that can tear down strongholds and philosophies that are in opposition to God.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Second, the nature of this battle is different from an earthly battle. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul talks about the nature of this spiritual battle: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness of this world, against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places."

We can also have confidence because God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13).

Many Christians do not like the warfare imagery in the Bible, but that is how the spiritual life is described. We need to prepare for this spiritual battle even if we would like to ignore the battle for truth and error as well as the battle for life and death that is taking place around us.

Third, the Bible tells us that to prepare for battle. We must wear the right armor and have the right weapons, which include truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and prayer:

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:14-18a).

The Bible also calls upon us to be strong in the Lord. We should be steadfast in our resistance to the Devil. We do this by putting on the whole armor of God and resisting Satan. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so

that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

The Three Ws

One way to understand the nature of spiritual warfare is to consider the three Ws: our walk, our weapons, and our warfare.

First let's consider our walk. Paul says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh” (2 Corinthians 10:3). Our war is not an earthly one but a spiritual one. So even though we do walk in the flesh, our warfare is not fleshly.

We should understand that we didn't start this war but it has been going on long before we came on the scene. For a war to exist, there must be threat from those intend to harm others.

For the battle to be successful, those who are threatened must be willing to stand up and fight. Many wars have been lost because good people refused to fight. And many Christians believe that the reason Satan has been so successful in the world is because either (1) Christians have been unwilling to fight, or (2) Christians have not even been aware that there is a spiritual battle.

The second W is our weapons. Paul also teaches, “for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:4). One of the most important weapons of our warfare is the Word of God. Paul calls it the “Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17).

We are also instructed to wear armor before we go into battle (Ephesians 6). We are to gird our loins with truth (vs. 14a). That means we need to define the truth, defend the truth, and spread the truth. We are also to wear the breastplate of righteousness (vs. 14b). That means we are to rely on the

righteousness of Jesus and live holy and righteous lives. We are also to take up the shield of faith (vs. 16). When we have bold faith, we are able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of Satan. And we are to take the helmet of salvation (vs. 17). We need to be assured of our salvation and stand firm in that assurance.

The third W is our warfare. What is the goal of spiritual warfare? Paul says, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). We cannot fight this war with physical weapons because our targets are not physical. They are intellectual and spiritual. So we cannot fight them with guns or planes or bombs.

The word "speculations" (which is sometimes translated "imagination") refers to the mind. It includes our thoughts and our reflections. So we should challenge the false ideas that Satan has encouraged in the world by countering unbiblical speculations and proclaiming God's truth.

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

How does spiritual warfare affect us?

When the New Testament uses the term "world," most of the time it is a translation from the word *kosmos*. Sometimes it can mean simply the planet earth (John 1:10; Acts 17:24). But when we talk about the influence of the world on our spiritual life and on our souls, we are talking about the worldly system in which we live. This world system involves culture and philosophy that is ultimately in opposition to God. That doesn't mean that everyone is evil or that the world's system is filled with nothing but error. But it does mean that the world can have a negative influence on our souls.

Paul warns not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). He

also warns us not to let our hearts and minds be taken captive to these false ideas: "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).

The Bible teaches that many temptations come from the world's system. We read in 1 John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."

The second influence is the flesh. Like our previous term, the word flesh can have different meanings. Sometimes it merely refers to our body: our flesh and bones (Luke 24:39; Acts 2:26). In this context, however, flesh is a second area of temptation and thus an important instrument of sin. We see this in the fact that we are born with a sin nature (Romans 7:14-24; 8:5-9). It is part of our bodies (Romans 7:25; 1 John 1:8-10) even after we have accepted Jesus Christ. But the good news is that its power over us has been broken (Romans 6:1-14) so that we can have victory over sin (Romans 8:1-4).

A third influence is the Devil. The ruler and mastermind behind the world's system is Satan. He can use the various distractions of the world's system to draw us into sin, temptation, and worldliness. We read in 1 John 2:15 that "If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So the Devil can use the world to turn our affections from God to the world.

Satan can also attack us through our flesh. He can entice our flesh with various temptations. We read in 1 John 2:16 that "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." He can draw our attention away from God by manipulating the desires of the flesh.

Spiritual Weapons

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual because the battle we are fighting is spiritual. Paul clearly states this in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." This is a spiritual battle that takes place in the heavenly places.

We should also realize that we are not warring against flesh and blood but against a spiritual enemy. So even though we might be tempted to think that people are our real enemy, our real enemy is Satan and his demons. People are merely pawns in the heavenly chess game being played out in our lives and in our world.

Paul tells us that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). So what are those weapons? It is interesting that Paul does not give a list to those who he is writing to in the church in Corinth. Therefore, we must assume that they were already aware of what those weapons are based on other letters Paul wrote to the various churches.

One obvious weapon is the weapon of truth. Believers are given insight into both the earthly realm and the heavenly realm because of what has been revealed in Scripture. We know what is behind the forces we wrestle with (Ephesians 6:12).

Another weapon is love. In fact, the Bible links truth with love ("speaking the truth in love" –Ephesians 4:15). Love is also a very powerful weapon in this spiritual warfare that we encounter. We should not approach people with anger or judgmentalism. But we must understand how important love is in dealing with others (1 Corinthians 13).

A third weapon is faith. Faith is defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Notice that faith is a conviction of things that are not seen. This is an important attribute since spiritual warfare is an invisible war. Faith is the recognition of this invisible world and the confidence that God is still in control.

And a very important weapon is prayer. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray continually (some translations say to pray without ceasing). We are exhorted to pray about the circumstances we encounter and to use prayer as a weapon in our spiritual battle. When Paul talks about Christians putting on the armor to fight spiritual battles, he says that “with all prayer and petition” we are to “pray at all times in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18).

©2010 Probe Ministries

A Pilgrim's Progress: Suffering in the Life of John Bunyan – A Christian View of Suffering

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

A Suffering Pilgrim

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



Bunyan was born in England in 1628 at a time of great political and religious unrest. In 1644, at just fifteen years old, both his mother and sister died within a month of each other. Later that year, "when Bunyan had turned sixteen, he was drafted into the Parliamentary Army and for about two years was taken from his home for military service."[\[3\]](#) He married in 1648, at about the age of twenty, but his wife died just ten years later, leaving him with four children, the oldest of whom was blind. He married again the following year, in 1659, but incredibly, just one year after this, "Bunyan was arrested and put in prison."[\[4\]](#) His wife, who was pregnant at the time, suffered a miscarriage, probably because of the added stress which this ordeal created. She was then left to care for Bunyan's four children while he spent the next twelve years in jail.[\[5\]](#)

As you can see, Bunyan was no stranger to suffering. Indeed, he had an intimate, firsthand acquaintance with heartache, trials, and difficulties. But what crimes had he committed to be cast into prison? Essentially, the charges against him were two: first, "he refused to attend the services of the

Established church” of England; and second, he “preached to unlawful assemblies.”[\[6\]](#) You see, Bunyan had converted to Christianity during his first marriage and had become a powerful and respected preacher. But in the volatile political and religious climate of that day, the freedom of Nonconformist preachers like Bunyan eventually came to an end. And when it did, he was arrested and put in prison.

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

The Pilgrim’s Conversion

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

Bunyan’s young wife had a very godly father. When he died, he left her two books which she brought into her marriage: *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. According to Bunyan, although these books did not awaken him to his “sad and sinful state,” they nevertheless did arouse within him “some desires to religion.”[\[8\]](#) One of the practical effects of these new desires was Bunyan’s regular attendance at a local church.

Soon Bunyan also began to read the Bible. He then came under such powerful conviction of sin that he scarcely knew what to do. “Sin and corruption,” he wrote, “would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. . . I thought none but the devil himself could equalize me for

inward wickedness and pollution of mind.”{9} Bunyan was plunged into a state of despair over the greatness of his sin which, he tell us, “continued a long while, even for some years together.”{10}

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

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

The Pilgrim’s Imprisonment

According to Bunyan, five or six years after his conversion, in about the year 1655, some of the believers in his local congregation began entreating him “to speak a word of exhortation unto them.”{13} Although initially hesitant, Bunyan agreed to their request “and suddenly a great preacher was discovered.”{14} Apparently, word spread quickly through the English countryside. According to one author, “In the days of toleration, a day’s notice would get a crowd of 1,200 to hear him preach at 7 o’clock in the morning on a weekday.”{15}

Unfortunately, it was not to last. In 1660, the same year in

which Charles II was brought home as king in the Restoration of the Monarchy, John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned “for preaching without state approval.”[{16}](#) Officially, he was charged with being in violation of the Elizabethan Conventicle Act of 1593. According to this Act, anyone found guilty of “abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and . . . being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings . . . could be held without bail until he or she submitted to the authority of the Anglican church.”[{17}](#) As a Nonconformist preacher, this Act applied to men like Bunyan.

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

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

Although these qualifications must be admitted, we must never lose sight of the fact that Bunyan was willing to endure twelve long years of this suffering, rather than agree to give up preaching. And thankfully, as we’ll see, God brought a great deal of good out of His faithful servant’s suffering.

The Pilgrim’s Writings

Most people today know John Bunyan as the author of *The*

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

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

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

*He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and though his writings are . . . full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress*—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is *Bibline*, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.* [{23}](#)

Not even his suffering in prison could dampen Bunyan's enthusiasm for the Word of God or for writing. Indeed, if

anything, it increased it. Some of his best-known works were written from the confines of a prison cell. These include *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, written during his first imprisonment, as well as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, apparently completed during a second, briefer period of imprisonment in 1677.[{24}](#) Bunyan's writings are surely one of his greatest gifts to the church.

Lessons from a Suffering Pilgrim

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

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

By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. . . . The second was, to live upon God that is invisible; as Paul said in another place, the way not to

faint, is to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen, they are eternal[{26}](#).

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

Notes

1. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 375, cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 60.
2. W. R. Owens, “Introduction,” in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (New York: Penguin, 1987), xxiii.
3. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 49.
4. *Ibid.*, 54.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Owens, “Introduction,” xv.
7. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (New York: Penguin, 1987), 8.
8. *Ibid.*, 10.
9. *Ibid.*, 24.

10. Ibid.
11. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 52.
12. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 59.
13. Ibid., 67-68.
14. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 53.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 47.
17. Owens, "Notes," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 127, n. 137.
18. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 48.
19. Owens, "Introduction," xvi.
20. Ibid.
21. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 60.
22. Ibid., 60-61.
23. Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 159; cited in Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 77.
24. Owens, "Introduction," xvi-xvii.
25. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 79.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

U.S. and Mexico: Biblical Worldview Lite or God-focused Worldview

A biblical worldview is a common topic in my book, *Cultural Captives*, and in some my other recent [postings](#). What does this multi-national survey tell us about worldviews in Mexico as

Mexico	All	35	16	38	19	13	6
	Under 30	26	9	25	7	10	2
	60 plus	42	26	38	25	22	22
United States	All	27	6	51	22	10	3
	Under 30	8	5	44	28	6	2
	60 plus	37	5	5	12	8	2

Let's begin by looking at Catholics since they are the dominant religious group in Mexico. Only a minority of Catholics of any age profess to having a God-focused worldview. In both countries, there is a significant difference between those under 30 and those 60 and over: 26% vs. 42% in Mexico and 8% vs. 37% in the United States. The percentage of Catholic emerging adults with a GFW in Mexico is small (26%) but completely dwarfs the United States percentage (8%).

Adding the question regarding pluralism (GFW Plus), only about 16% of Mexican Catholics answer all the questions as indicated above. There is a wide discrepancy based on age, with only 9% of those under 30 and over 26% of those over 60 professing a GFW Plus view. In the United States, we see a much different story, with only about 5% of self-identified Catholics professing to hold a GFW Plus view across all age groups.

We see a similar set of distributions for those who self-identify as an atheist, agnostic or none (AAN). In both countries, only a small percentage of AAN people hold to this abbreviated God-focused worldview.

Protestants in Mexico have a similar distribution of GFW and GFW Plus adherents, as do the Catholics. In the United States, the picture is significantly different between Catholics and Protestants. First, almost twice as many Protestants hold to a GFW view as do Catholics. Similarly, for a GFW Plus view, three to four times as many Protestants as Catholics hold that view (about 20% to 5%).

One odd result is that 29% of Protestant, emerging adults profess to hold a GFW Plus view, while only 12% of Protestants age 60 and above hold to that view. Although we cannot know for sure, this result may be an artifact of the question “The only acceptable religion is my religion?” Perhaps the older adults interpreted “my religion” to be my denomination and certainly other Christian denominations could be acceptable. Those below age 45 interpreted “my religion” to be Christianity, and other religions were other major world faiths. This interpretation is plausible because the emerging adults have grown up in a society where they know people of other religions at work and at school, much more so than their elders.

In summary, most self-identified Christians in both countries do not hold to a God-focused worldview. Among that minority, Catholics in Mexico are much more likely than Catholics in the United States to hold such a worldview, while the inverse is true among Protestants. In all instances except one, emerging adults are significantly less likely to hold a GFW or GFW Plus view than are older adults.

Comparing Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims and American Christians

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In a prior [blog post](#), we looked at how Muslims in the Eastern Hemisphere reported their adherence to the five pillars of Islamic religious practice. We saw that the percentage who reported faithfully applying four of the five pillars was low,

especially given the importance of these pillars in enhancing one's chance of entering paradise.

In this post, let us consider some basic practices that someone who is concerned about following the teaching of any religion should follow.

Once again, for Muslims we are using a 2012 Pew Research Center survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In looking at the data, we will consider age and geographic regions of North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this comparison of faiths and regions, we selected the following questions used in the Pew survey:

- 1. How important is religion in your life? Very important*
- 2. On average, how often do you attend the mosque for Salah and Jum'ah Prayer? Once a month or more*
- 3. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray? Once a day or more*
- 4. How often do you read or listen to the Qur'an? At least once a week*
- 5. Do you give zakat, that is, give a set percentage of your wealth to charity or the mosque? Yes*
- 6. How much does the way you live your life reflect the Hadith and Sunna, that is, the sayings and actions of the Prophet? A lot [{1}](#)*

For someone serious about practicing their faith, this list should be critical to understanding and applying one's faith and also fairly easy to apply. The results from the survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice
--

Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	9%	14%	3%	1%	19%
30 plus	15%	20%	6%	2%	27%

The most obvious result is that the percentages are very low. Across all the respondents, only 12% of them practice these six activities. So, the vast majority of Muslims are at best nominal practitioners of a religious life. We also see a significant difference between geographic regions. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans, we see that virtually no one is committed to these six practices. Those surveyed in South Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, are most likely to be serious about these basic religious practices, where one in four report following all six of the practices above.

We also see a difference based on age in all geographic regions. Across all five geographic regions, those who are 30 years old and beyond report levels of religious practice from 40% to over 100% greater than for those 18 to 29 years old.

For a similar look at Christians in the United States, we are using the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) from 2012. From that study, we utilize a similar set of questions to define a basic religious practice:

1. *How important is religion or religious faith to you personally? Extremely important*
2. *How often do you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals? At least twice a month*
3. *How often have you typically prayed, not including before meals and at religious services? At least once a day*
4. *How often have you typically read the Bible in the past 12 months? At least once a week*
5. *During the year 2011, what was the total dollar value of all donation made to your local congregation? Age 30+ value > \$999, Age 20 – 29 value > \$399*

6. *I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.*

As you can see, these questions are very similar to those asked in the Pew survey of Muslims. The results from this survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice			
Age	Evangelical	All Christian	
20 – 29	7.3%	4.8%	
30 plus	16.7%	10.1%	

These results are very close to the results for Muslims—somewhat less than North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, and somewhat more than the ‘Stans. Similar to the results for the Muslims, emerging adults are significantly less likely than those over 30 to be serious about their religious practice. Nine out of ten Christians in America are not serious enough about their walk with God to practice the basics needed for an active Christian life.

It is safe to say that most American Christians and Muslims in the Eastern hemisphere are identified with a religion which they don’t really understand and don’t spend the time and effort necessary to gain understanding and live according to its principles.

Note

1. The next possible answer was “a little” which seems way too weak to reflect a serious practice of Islam.

Acknowledgement: The World’s Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives,

www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

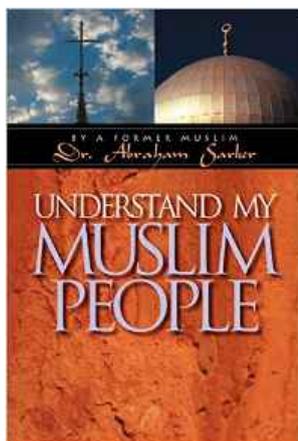
Acknowledgement: Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com.

© Probe Ministries 2016

Basic Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Since Probe has been evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs and practices varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.



To evaluate the religious practices of Muslims, a reasonable place to start would be the Five Pillars of Islam. “Muslims hope that by completing these duties of Islam, Allah will favor them and grant them entrance into heaven.”^[1] In other words, performing these duties are necessary but not sufficient to gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. These five pillars are:

1. Declaring “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet.”
2. Praying five times each day in Arabic quoting from the Qur’an
3. Fasting during daylight hours of the month of Ramadan
4. Giving 2.5% of their income for the poor and for the cause of Islam
5. Completing the hajj, a ritual pilgrimage to Mecca

Because the hajj is a once in a lifetime event and according to the survey data is most likely to occur after the age of 60 (if at all), only the first four pillars are considered in our analysis. The results divided into age groups and regions of the world are as follows:

% Practicing Four of the Pillars of Islam					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The ‘Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	49%	41%	10%	11%	49%
30 plus	58%	57%	16%	17%	60%

As shown, the geographical groups vary significantly. The composite of all those surveyed is 40% of the respondents claim to practice these four pillars. While not miniscule, this does indicate that the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim are not seriously attempting to gain favor with

Allah by adhering to these four key pillars of the faith.

One startling thing we note from this table is that the Eastern European (e.g. Russia, Bosnia, Turkey) Muslims and those from the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars to the same degree as other areas surveyed. In those areas, less than 1 in 7 practice the four pillars, while in the other areas it is more than half of the people. In general, Eastern European Muslims and those in the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars, much less the five pillars, of Islam. Given this, one may argue that the Islam practiced in these parts of the world is not Islam at all, but rather another religion with a historical name, Islam, which may at some point in the past been the dominant religion.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in practice versus age. From our earlier blog post on religious beliefs, the results showed very little difference between those ages 18 – 29 and the rest of the respondents, but this is not the case for religious practice. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans those over the age of 30 are more than 50% more likely to practice the four pillars than are those aged 18 to 29. In the other areas of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the older adults are 18% to 37% more likely to practice the key pillars of Islam. In fact, if we compare those ages 18 to 29 with those 60 and older these ratios grow to more than 150% and 31% to 50% respectively.

It appears that the younger adults are not as committed to carrying out these practices as their elders. We can only speculate on whether this difference will diminish as they get older. This difference may in fact shrink over time because, as noted earlier, there is virtually no difference in the percent of young adults and the percent of older adults who profess a Muslim worldview.

The results found for this aspect of religious practice are generally consistent with those reported for [religious beliefs](#)

(i.e., a Muslim worldview). We find the majority of those who claim to be Muslim to NOT hold a Muslim worldview and do not practice the five pillars of Islam. In our next post, we will compare Muslim religious practice with Christian religious practice in the United States.

Note

1. Dr. Abraham Sarkar, *Understand My Muslim People*, page 169, Barclay Press, 2004.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

© 2016 Probe Ministries

Basic Religious Beliefs of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The survey asked people to describe their religious beliefs and practices, and sought to gauge respondents' knowledge of and attitudes toward other faiths, as well as some of their attitudes concerning cultural issues.

Since Probe has been commissioning and evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

If you have read [Cultural Captives](#) or been following [my blog posts](#), you know that one of the metrics we have been following is the percentage of Americans with a Christian worldview. One survey we analyzed recently is the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) 2012. That survey shows that American Christians holding a biblical worldview were 33% of 18- to 29-year-old self-professed evangelicals, [{1}](#) and 46% of those over 30. When we consider all professing Christians (i.e. evangelical, mainline and Catholic), we find 20% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 32% of those over 30 hold a biblical worldview. For the PALS, the definition used for a biblical worldview is:

- 1. I definitely believe in God*
- 2. Jesus is the Son of God and physically rose from the dead*
- 3. The Bible is fully inspired by God*
- 4. Heaven exists where people live with God forever*
- 5. There is a Hell where people experience pain as punishment for their sin*
- 6. The Devil, demons, or evil spirits exist*
- 7. What is morally right or wrong should be determined by God's law*

For Muslims, using questions asked in the Pew survey, we defined a Qur'anic worldview to include the following responses:

- 1. I believe in one God, Allah, and his prophet Muhammad*

2. *I know a great deal about the Muslim religion and its practices*
3. *In Heaven, people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded*
4. *In Hell, people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished*
5. *I believe in angels and in jinns (spirit beings similar to demons)*
6. *I believe Islam is the one, true faith leading to eternal life in heaven*

The results of the survey showing those Muslims who agreed to all the above points are as shown in the table below.

	North Africa	Middle East	Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	33.2%	24.1%	12.3%	4.0%	28.2%
30 plus	35.3%	30.4%	11.8%	4.8%	27.5%

What do we see in this data? First, the vast majority of Muslims living in the Eastern Hemisphere do not hold to a strong Qur'anic worldview. North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia all show about one third with a Qur'anic worldview. These numbers are much like those for a Christian worldview in the U.S. In Europe and the 'Stans, we see only about one in ten and one in twenty, respectively, hold a strong Qur'anic worldview. One might speculate that the European downturn is due to the general decline in religious interest in Europe, and the low percentage in the 'Stans is due to a lack of teaching in their heart language. [\[2\]](#)

In understanding these low responses, one should consider that on the whole, only about 40% of Muslims claim to know a great deal about their religion and its practices. This lack of knowledge is probably a major factor in why only about 20% of them hold a strong Qur'anic worldview. This view is consistent with my personal experience in South Asia where I found that

most of the people in a Muslim country were born into their faith culture and had never considered in any depth what it really meant.

One other interesting note is that in all areas other than the Middle East, the percentage of those aged 18 to 29 with a strong Qur'anic worldview is almost identical to those over 30 years of age. In contrast, among Christians in America, only one in five of those aged 18 to 29 have a biblical worldview while one in three of those age 30 and over have a biblical worldview.

It should also be noted that among Muslims, over three out of four of them believe that Islam is the one true faith leading to eternal life. But among American Christians, only one out of five believe Jesus is the only way to receive eternal life. Even though a minority of Muslims claim to know what their religion teaches, the vast majority believe that what it teaches is the only way to eternal life. Even though they believe it is the only way, only about one in five believe that members of their religion "have a duty to try and convert others to their religious faith."

I imagine that many Americans think that Muslims hold to a common set of beliefs throughout the world. As we have seen from this survey, that is not the case. The majority of Muslims do not understand the basic tenets of Islam as taught in the Qur'an. Surprisingly, most of them admit it, saying that they do not know a great deal about the Muslim religion. Next week, we will look at their religious practices which tend to be more consistent than their religious beliefs.

Notes

1. Evangelicals include those associated with an evangelical denomination including historically Black Protestant churches.
2. Please note that this is only speculation on my part; there

is no information in the Pew survey to enlighten us on this question.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Acknowledgement: Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com.

© 2016 Probe Ministries

Pornography – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at pornography from a biblical worldview perspective. He clearly chronicles the physical, emotional and spiritual harm created by pornography and lays out the scriptural warnings to protect us from its degrading effects.

Pornography has been tearing apart the very fabric of modern society, but the problem has been made much worse with pornography's proliferation through the Internet. Studies show that 40 million adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites.[\[1\]](#) To put that in perspective, that is ten times the amount of people who regularly watch baseball.

When I first started writing about pornography in the 1980s, it was already a multi-billion dollar-a-year business mostly promoted through so-called “adult bookstores” and pornographic magazines. With the development of videos, DVDs, and the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous.



The wages of sin are enormous when pornography is involved. Revenue from Internet porn exceeds by nearly a 2 to 1 ratio, the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.[{2}](#) And sales of pornographic material on the Internet surpass the cumulative sales of all other products sold online.[{3}](#)

The current estimate is the there are over 4 million pornographic websites representing almost 400 million pages of pornographic material.[{4}](#)

Pornography is not just something a few men view in the late hours in the privacy of their homes. At least 70 percent of porn is downloaded during work hours (9 am to 5 pm). A percentage of those who do so admit to accessing pornography at work.

And pornography also affects those in church. According to *Leadership Journal*, 40 percent of pastors admit to visiting a pornographic website.[{5}](#) And at one Promise Keepers Convention, 53 percent of men admitted to visiting a porn site the week before.[{6}](#)

The impact pornography is having on young people is alarming. It used to be that when you would ask someone when they first saw pornography they would tell you a story about seeing a porn magazine at a friend’s house when they were in middle school or high school. Now a child in grade school has already seen images that were only available in an adult bookstore a few years ago. At one time these images were inaccessible to youth; now they are merely a mouse click away. The average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old. And

the largest consumer of Internet pornography is the 12-17 age group.[{7}](#)

How should we define pornography? What is the effect on individuals and society? And what is a biblical perspective on this? I deal with each of these questions in detail in my book, *Christians Ethics in Plain Language*.[{8}](#) In the next section, we address some of these questions.

Definition and Types of Pornography

How should we define pornography? Pornography has been defined as material that “is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.” Hardcore pornography “is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose.”[{9}](#)

Another important term is obscenity. In the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. California*, the justices set forth a three-part test to define obscenity:[{10}](#)

- (a) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.
- (b) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and
- (c) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

What are the types of pornography? The first type of pornography is adult magazines, which are primarily directed toward adult male readers. The magazines with the widest distribution (*Playboy* and *Penthouse*) do not violate the *Miller* standards of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed.

The second type of pornography is video. Videocassettes or

DVDs are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and the Internet. They have become a growth industry for pornography.

The third type of pornography is motion pictures. Ratings standards are being relaxed, and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called "hard R" rated films would have been considered obscene just a few decades ago.

A fourth type of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. But cable television poses an even greater threat. The Federal Communications Commission does not regulate cable in the same way it does public access stations. Thus, many pornographic movies are shown on cable television.

A fifth type of pornography is audio porn, which includes "Dial-a-porn" telephone calls, the second fastest growth market of pornography. Although most of the messages are within the *Miller* definition of obscenity, these businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A sixth type of pornography is "cyberporn," or Internet pornography. Virtually anyone can download and view hard-core pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts through the Internet.

Addiction to Pornography

Victor Cline, a psychologist, documented how men become addicted to pornographic materials, then begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and finally act out what they have seen.[\[11\]](#) He maintained "that memories of experiences that occurred at times of emotional arousal (which could include sexual arousal) are imprinted on the brain by epinephrine, an adrenal gland hormone, and are difficult to erase. This may partly explain pornography's addicting effect."[\[12\]](#)

Other research showed that biochemical and neurological responses in individuals who are aroused release the adrenal hormone epinephrine in the brain, which is why one can remember pornographic images seen years before. In response to pleasure, nerve endings release chemicals that reinforce the body's own desire to repeat the process.[{13}](#) Kimberly Young, an authority on Internet addiction, found that 90 percent of those who became addicted to cyberporn became addicted to the two-way communication functions: chat rooms, newsgroups, and e-mail.[{14}](#)

Psychologists identified a five-step pattern in pornographic addiction. The first step is *exposure*. Addicts have been exposed to pornography in many ways, ranging from sexual abuse as children to looking at widely available pornographic magazines.

The second step is *addiction*. People who continually expose themselves to pornography "keep coming back for more and more" in order to get new sexual highs. James L. McCough of the University of California at Irvine said that "experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase."[{15}](#)

A third step is *escalation*. Previous sexual highs become more difficult to attain; therefore users of pornography begin to look for more exotic forms of sexual behavior to bring them stimulation.

A fourth step is *desensitization*. What was initially shocking becomes routine. Shocking and disgusting sexual behavior is no longer avoided but is sought out for more intense stimulation. Concern about pain and degradation get lost in the pursuit of the next sexual experience.

A fifth step is *acting out fantasies*. People do what they have seen and find pleasurable. Not every pornography addict will

become a serial murderer or a rapist. But many do look for ways to act out their sexual fantasies

In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I discuss in further detail the issue of pornographic addiction as well as describe the social and psychological effects of pornography.

Social Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because of some of the prevailing theories of its impact. One theory was that pornography actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a “safety valve” for potential sexual offenders.

The most famous proponent of this theory was Berl Kutchinsky, a criminologist at the University of Copenhagen. His famous study on pornography found that when the Danish government lifted restrictions on pornography, the number of sex crimes decreased.^[16] Therefore, he concluded that the availability of pornography siphons off dangerous sexual impulses. But when the data for his “safety-valve” theory was further evaluated, many of his research flaws began to show.

For example, Kutchinsky failed to distinguish between different kinds of sex crimes (such as rape and indecent exposure) and instead merely lumped them together, effectively masking an increase in rape statistics. He also failed to consider that increased tolerance for certain crimes (public nudity and sex with a minor) may have contributed to a drop in the reported crimes.

Proving cause and effect in pornography is virtually impossible because, ethically, researchers cannot do certain kinds of research. As Dolf Zillman said, “Men cannot be placed at risk of developing sexually violent inclinations by extensive exposure to violent or nonviolent pornography, and women cannot be placed at risk of becoming victims of such

inclinations.”[{17}](#)

Nevertheless, a number of compelling statistics suggest that pornography does have profound social consequences. For example, of the 1,400 child sexual molestation cases in Louisville, Kentucky, between July 1980 and February 1984, adult pornography was connected with each incident and child pornography with the majority of them.[{18}](#)

Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves before and during their assaults.[{19}](#) Police officers have seen the impact pornography has had on serial murders. In fact, pornography consumption is one of the most common profile characteristics of serial murders and rapists.[{20}](#)

Professor Cass Sunstein, writing in the *Duke Law Journal*, said that some sexual violence against women “would not have occurred but for the massive circulation of pornography.” Citing cross-cultural data, he concluded, “The liberalization of pornography laws in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries has been accompanied by a rise in reported rape rates. In countries where pornography laws have not been liberalized, there has been a less steep rise in reported rapes. And in countries where restrictions have been adopted, reported rapes have decreased.”[{21}](#)

Biblical Perspective

God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:27) as sexual beings. But because of sin in the world (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24-25).

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Pornography also distorts God’s gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1

Cor. 7:2-3). When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman's breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man's or woman's sexual organs.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23), adultery (Lev. 18:20), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

A biblical perspective of human sexuality must recognize that sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word "know" indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19). Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Gen. 1:28).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt. 5:27-28).

Moreover, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a comparison mentality, a performance-based sexuality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, decreased self concept, and obsessive thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14).

Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

Notes

1. Mark Penn, *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* (NY: Twelve, 2007), 276.
2. *Ibid.*, 277.
3. George Barna, *Boiling Point: Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 223.
4. Truth in Porn, www.truthinporn.org.
5. The Leadership survey on Pastors and Internet Pornography, 1 January 2001, <http://ctlibrary.com/9582>.
6. *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003.
7. Truth in Porn.
8. Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), chapter 11.
9. Michael McManus, ed., *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 1986), 8.
10. *Miller v. California*, 413 US 15, 47 (1973).
11. Victor Cline, *Where Do You Draw the Line?* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974).
12. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children* (New York: Morality in Media, 1990), 11.
13. J. L. McGaugh, “Preserving the Presence of the Past,” *American Psychologist*, February 1983, 161.
14. Kimberley Young, Paper presented to 1997 convention of the American Psychological Association. A full treatment can be found in Kimberley Young, *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction-and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998).
15. Quoted in Kenneth Kantzer, “The Power of Porn,” *Christianity Today*, 7 February 1989, 18.

16. Berl Kutchinsky, "The Effect of Easy Availability of Pornography on the Incidence of Sex Crimes: The Danish Experience," *Journal of Social Issues* 29 (1973): 163-81.
17. Dolf Zillman, "Pornography Research and Public Policy," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, ed. Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (New York: Academic, 1989), 387-88.
18. Testimony by John B. Rabun, deputy director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited children, before the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 12 September 1984.
19. W. Marshall, "Pornography and Sex Offenders," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*.
20. *The Men Who Murdered*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, August 1985.
21. Cass R. Sunstein, "Pornography and the First Amendment," *Duke Law Journal*, September 1986, 595.