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

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

1. How Often Do You Witness to Your Faith?

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

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

So the majority of American believers (of any faith) must believe that at least for some people with different religious beliefs, it would be better for them to turn from their current belief and accept the tenets of my faith. They want to do this even though they believe that there are multiple ways to God not beyond just their faith.

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

Figure 1 Witness with a Desire to See Conversion

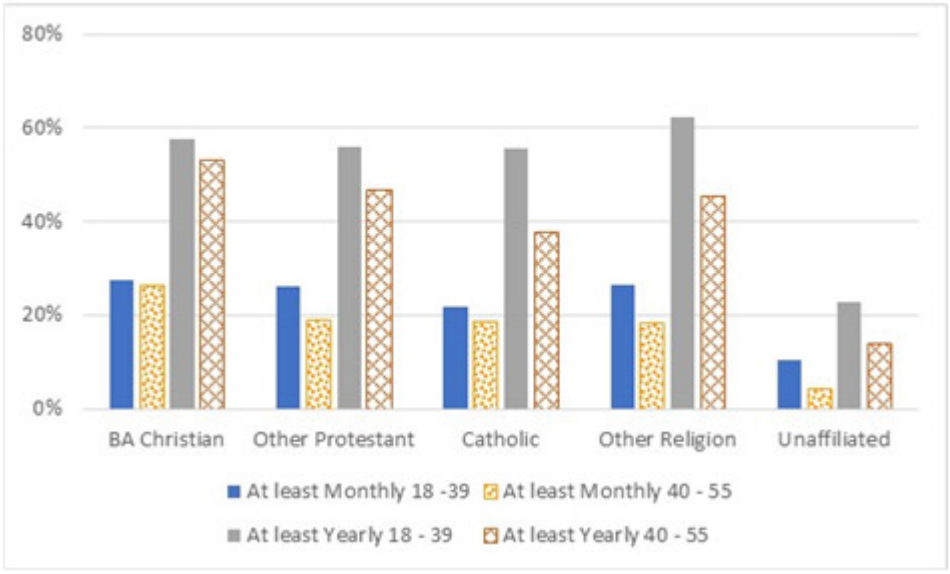


Table 1 below shows several estimates as to how many people are the recipients of these "*intentional spiritual conversations*" in a given year. The different levels shown are based on different assumptions as to how often they share with the same person and how many people they share with in a year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

Table 1 Potential

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

Religious Affiliation of Person Sharing with Intent to Convert	Potential number of individuals shared with in one year		
	Low estimate (millions){1}	Nominal estimate (millions){2}	High estimate (millions){3}
Born Again Protestant	27	56	118

Other Protestant	24	50	106
Catholic	25	51	108
Other Religion	15	31	65
Unaffiliated	12	25	52
Total	**103**	**212**	**449**

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

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

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

think like them when it comes to religion.

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

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

How Should We Respond?

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

Among Born Again Christians, we project they are sharing their faith with between 25 million and 100 million nonbelievers. However, they are sharing ineffectively with the number being shared with far exceeding the growth rate of evangelicals in America. So, pastors and parachurch organizations need to up their game in training their people to share the good news of Christ. BAC’s need to understand and practice the following:

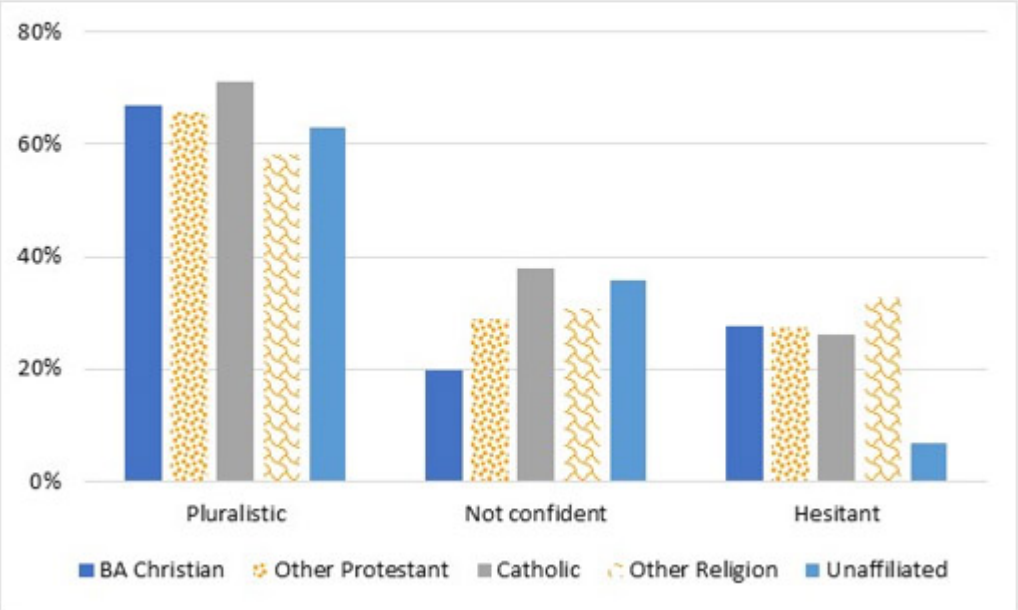
1. Bathe their unsaved acquaintances in prayer asking God to bring to a clear feeling of need
2. Recognize their call to effectively share the gospel looking for opportunities to share

3. Understand how to build bridges spanning the gaps of understanding for those with different worldviews
4. Clearly explain the wonderful gift purchased for us through Jesus' death and resurrection
5. Unapologetically ask for a response to the good news shared with others
6. Realize that they should not be discouraged by a lack of interest of the lack of a positive response

2. What Keeps You From Communicating Your Religious Belief?

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

Figure 2 Reason for Refraining from Witnessing Americans 18 through 39



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

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

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

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

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

Looking at both of the charts, we see that (even with a lot of people saying they sometimes used excuses to avoid the subject) a majority of people of any religious group (not including the unaffiliated) share with someone with a desire to recruit them at least once a year. I would suspect that most of these people are sharing with a family member or close friend. However, we did not ask the question so that is only reasonable speculation.

How Should We Respond?

If you are a church leader or a person who desires to see Christians sharing the good news of Jesus with those who need

to know, how should you respond to this data on self-identified barriers to sharing with others?

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

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

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

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

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

The following options were given to select from:

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

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

Ages 18 – 39					
	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Other Religion	Unaffiliated
Don’t believe that God would take the penalty for my sin	4.1%	13.7%	16.3%	10.6%	5.9%
Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned	15.7%	20.1%	23.8%	22.0%	8.0%
I am clearly as good as Christians I know	11.9%	10.6%	16.2%	12.9%	8.1%
There is no personal, creator God	1.0%	2.8%	2.7%	5.8%	23.9%
Another answer not listed here	6.9%	9.9%	9.3%	21.9%	28.2%
Never gave the question any thought	15.0%	29.7%	16.3%	12.7%	13.5%
Not applicable, I do believe	45.4%	13.3%	15.5%	14.1%	12.5%

The first thing to notice in this table is that less than half of Born Again Protestants selected “Not applicable, I do believe.” This result is odd since one of the questions

required to be considered a Born Again Protestant is "The statement that best describes you own belief about what will happen to you after you die is '*I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.*'" Perhaps some of the Born Agains thought we wanted to know what was keeping them away before they surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is because some of them consider "confessed my sins and accepted" as something they did to earn their salvation. In that case, one could possibly consider answers 2, 5, 6 and 7 as consistent with Born Again Protestants. Although that would be somewhat of a stretch. That assumption still leaves 17% of BA Protestants whose answers are clearly inconsistent.

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

The most common answer from the Unaffiliated is "another answer not listed here" followed by "there is no personal, creator God". Those who claim that most "nothing in particulars" are really Christians find little support in that only one in five (20%) say that they do believe in salvation through faith in Jesus.

4. Christianity and Other Major World Religions

One of the things that drives our attitude toward and our approach to witnessing to our faith is how we think Christianity relates to other world religions. In part 2 of this series, we looked at some questions that dealt with

believing that multiple religions could offer a workable road to an eternity with God. In this part we will look at what people believe distinguishes Christianity from other world religions if in fact anything does.

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

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

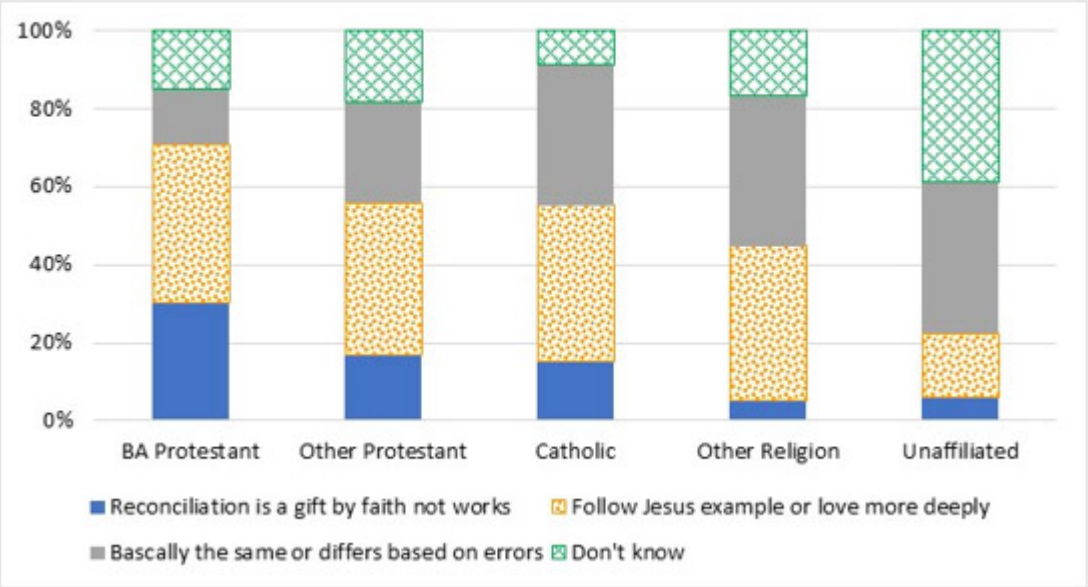
Note that answers 1, 5 and 6 indicate an ignorance about the tenets of Christianity and/or the tenets of other major world religions. As noted earlier, Christianity teaches a way to reconciliation that is very different from other world religions and is not compatible with the reconciliation stories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

Answers two and four reflect potential differences between Christianity and other world religions. We do want to follow Christ's example and other world religions would not teach us to do that. Other religions could not promote loving other people more deeply that Christianity does, but some of them might argue that they also promote love for others.

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

The results are charted in the graph to the right. First, notice the interesting result

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



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

Other Protestants and Catholics have less than one in five that selected 'reconciliation is a gift' and the total selecting answers 1 and 2 is slightly over one half. Thus, almost half of them selected answers showing ignorance of or disbelief in the basic tenets of Christianity.

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

5.Summary of Key Results

Among Americans ages 18 through 39 who profess an affiliation with some religion, we find that less than 1 out of 5 (20%) of them strongly disagree with the statement that Muhammad,

Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. Yet at the same time almost 6 out of 10 (60%) of them state that they share their faith with an unbeliever at least once a year with the intent of converting them to their belief.

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

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

Amazingly, one could project that nominally about 212 million Americans a year would be the recipients of these spiritual conversations with the intent to convert. However, if almost all of these
conversations were with the same person it might represent as few as 34 million Americans which could be primarily the children and relatives of the person sharing their faith. We cannot know for sure without asking more questions.

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

About one out of seven (14%) of adults under age 40 who **are not** Born Again Protestants believe that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This small number is true for Other Protestants, Catholics and Other Religions. This same group of

religious affiliates has about 1 in 3 who belief that salvation is a result of good works and is earned or rewarded on a curving scale.

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

Notes

1. Low Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 12 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 1 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual four times.
2. Nominal Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 18 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 2 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual three times.
3. High Estimate: Calculated assuming that those sharing at least monthly on the average shared their faith 24 times per year and those sharing at least yearly but less than monthly shared on the average 4 times per year AND that they shared on the average with the same individual two times.
4. Although most people selected only one answer, on this question they could select multiple answers
5. Exclusivists are those who believe that their religion is the only source of correct teaching concerning our relationship with God. When I get time, I will check out the relationship between those who are exclusivists and those who selected ‘reconciliation is a gift’

©2021 Probe Ministries

Headed to the Courtroom

June 18, 2013

Yesterday I was selected to serve on a jury for a trial that is anticipated to last three to four weeks. The jury selection process was an all-day affair, lasting over twelve hours and creating quite a sense of camaraderie in the process.

I keep thinking about the three major take-aways from this experience.

First, the multiple defense attorneys for the four defendants (thus the long trial) repeatedly reminded us that the American justice system is built on the foundation of "presumed innocent until proven guilty." And that is a very, very good thing, as horror stories emerge from countries where instant "justice" is meted out in cutting off or crushing limbs of those accused of stealing. And in countries where "mob justice" is part of everyday life. (See my blog post When God Does Nothing About Injustice.)

But it's not like that before God. Not a single one of us can protest innocence. Not only is every single one of us a sinner from conception (Ps. 51:5), but God knows every thought we think before we ever act on it. A totally holy, perfect God knows that we may be innocent of crimes before other men, but we are not innocent before Him.

Except that Jesus swapped His perfection and righteousness for our messed up guilt. It's like the judge coming down from his elevated seat, taking off his robes, and saying to a defendant that was just declared guilty, "I'll be taking your punishment for you." Amazing.

My second takeaway is gratitude for the teaching and experience in filtering life through a biblical filter. I am especially grateful for the wisdom of Proverbs 18:17—"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." All of us potential jurors were strongly encouraged to use common sense, and evaluate carefully everything we would hear. And (not surprisingly), the defense attorneys asked us not to draw any conclusions until we had heard everything. Those could be just platitudes, but since I know that God's Word said it first, it is my determined course of action.

The third takeaway is the importance of embracing God's right to put a long trial on my calendar. He is God; He has the right to interrupt my plans and put whatever He wants on my schedule. I had an idea of what I would be doing during the day over the next month, but God had different plans. I choose to trust Him and keep letting go of my impatient, wrong-headed belief that I should get to decide my agenda.

Then in one breathtaking moment, I had a paradigm shift that erupted in a heartfelt "Oh, *thank* You Lord!": the realization that this is nothing compared to the way a cancer diagnosis crashes into one's schedule, with a very different set of unwanted appointments on it. I'm pretty sure my sister Nanci, fighting breast cancer, would swap her chemo treatments with my courtroom dates in a heartbeat.

So the adventure with God continues . . .

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/headed-to-the-courtroom

Don’t Judge Me?

The 14-year-old daughter of a friend recently responded to her mother’s correction with, “Don’t judge me, Mom.” The same week, a friend of mine asked my opinion on something, and as I was mentally running it through the grid of “what does God say about this in His word,” she said, “Now, don’t you go judging me!”

Tolerance and acceptance—the *new* tolerance, which says that every value, belief and behavior should be embraced as equally valid—are the highest values of our culture. Which makes judging the most hideous and unacceptable of sins.

Now, to be fair, there is a lot of ugly judging in the world. Before a friend became a Christ follower, she was on the receiving end of a lot of hateful judging when she would protest at gay rights events, hearing “You’re going to hell!” and other ugly epithets. People who didn’t know her at all made judgments about her character and her destiny. I have personally received my share of hate mail from strangers accusing me of not being a Christian because I disagree with them on a cherished position.

But if we get pulled over for speeding, and the officer points out that we were going twenty miles over the speed limit, nobody says, “Don’t judge me, officer!” He’s not judging our character, he’s comparing our behavior to the law.

Judging is assuming you have all the facts and making an assessment of condemnation out of ignorance. It’s about smugly believing “I’m right and you’re wrong. You are lesser-than.”

There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to be familiar with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24

He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5)? That's about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another's sin, not to ignore other people's behavior.

But then there's the "big daddy" passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

> I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.
>
> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; often it's a matter of comparing one's behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of one's choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

Comparing someone's beliefs and actions to a standard can be a loving thing to do. A lady working in an after-school program noticed that one little girl was clearly not doing well on her homework, but she also seemed to not be working very hard at it. The teacher said, "I think your brain is switched off! May I touch your head? I think I can find the switch and turn it back on!" The wide-eyed little one gave permission and the teacher said with a smile, "Oh, here it is! Right under one of

your braids! Let's turn your brain back on!" What a lovely, eloquent way to call a child to live up to her potential without shaming or judging her for being lazy or stupid.

Challenging someone to be better than they are can be a gift. One of the best-ever movie lines is in "As Good As It Gets" when Jack Nicholson tells Helen Hunt, "You make me want to be a better man." When parents ask their children at report card time, "Did you do your best? Only you can know," they are giving them a chance to honestly compare their ability to their potential. It honors another to say something like, "I think you'll be happier with yourself if you live out your gifting" rather than shaming them with something like, "What a loser." Now *that's* shaming.

And judging.

And ugly.

And unlike Jesus.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/dont_judge_me on January 28, 2013.

Judge Shows: Spiritual Reality TV

I've been listening to a lot of TV lately.

I'm a calligrapher, and November/December is my busy season. I look for the kind of shows that don't need to be watched

because I'm focused on my hand lettering. So I've been listening to quite a few of the courtroom shows: Judge Judy, Judge Alex, Judge Marilyn, Judge Lynn, Judge Joe, and the others.

Lessons to be learned from judge shows:

- Some people don't know how to communicate without interrupting and talking over each other where neither can hear what the other is saying.

- When people roll their eyes and spit out contempt for each other, it's okay.

- There's nothing like money to break up friendships and family. Especially if you don't get _____ in writing.

- People go to court because there isn't an adult (read: parent) to mediate the way mom and dad used to referee sibling fights.

- People don't mind being exposed as foolish as long as they get their 15 minutes of fame on TV.

- People who watch judge shows will call into the program to give their opinion on a case that was closed long before it aired, and then listen to a sales pitch of their own free will.

I watch TV with a biblical worldview filter in place. I'm constantly comparing what I see and hear to what the Bible says. There's nothing like the judge shows to support a biblical view of people and of life in a fallen world. The brokenness of people doing life by their own rules, apart from God's wisdom and power, is just *so sad*.

People want to be loved and respected and valued and honored, and those are legitimate desires. But when they don't feel loved or respected, they'll act in unloving and disrespectful ways toward others.

People's hearts are hungry for what will fill them, but if they refuse to turn to the One who promised to "make their joy complete" (John 16:24), they will take the counterfeit of greed and materialism.

People haven't been taught biblical conflict resolution, and their pride often keeps them from taking responsibility for their part in a conflict and asking forgiveness for it.

Sin makes us messed up people, and part of the messed up-ness involves a willingness to make it public.

So these shows are a kind of painfully true "spiritual reality show."

How God must wince—and weep.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/judge_shows_spiritual_reality_tv on Dec. 21, 2010.

"Am I Judging When I Recognize Sin in a Friend's Life?"

Dear Sue,

My question is about judging. There are several of us friends and we are all Christians but go to different churches. One of our friends was widowed several years ago. After several failed relationships where she became sexually intimate with each of the men, she is now in another relationship with what

seems like a nice man. She is also very active in her church and is involved in a discipleship ministry. After she leaves the meetings to prepare for these discipleship events, she leaves town to go stay the weekend with her new friend.

I told one of the other friends that I did not think it was right that she was doing that and that may be why she had problems with her relationships, and that I felt it was wrong that she would be speaking before another group of women on this retreat. My other friend told me I was judging and that only God should do that and no one is without sin and that one sin is no greater than any other sin. I do not interpret the bible that way. I feel that if she is putting herself before others as a leader of God she should be striving to live sin free and be repenting when she does sin. Am I judging when I recognize a sin in another person's life? I do not want to be a judgmental person and am very confused about this. Please help me to understand and how I should have responded to her.

You are right. There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to stop with "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus' call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother's eye (Matt. 7:5)? That's about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another's sin, *not* to ignore other people's behavior.

But then there's the "big daddy" passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

> *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.*

> *But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*
>
> *What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."*

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. (News to your other friend, I'm sure!) Judging doesn't mean condemning, though; in the case of your immoral friend, it would be a matter of comparing her behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of her choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

It might sound like, "This is a hard conversation but I need to talk to you because I care about you. You're making decisions that are not consistent with the Christ-follower and the woman of God I know you want to be. Sexual immorality is still sin, and sin has consequences, and I don't want you to be hurt. But even more than that, you are dishonoring the Lord by your disobedience to His word. I am concerned that you are continuing in a leadership position while you are engaged in unrepented, continual sin. James 3:1 says that teachers will be judged more strictly, and I am concerned for what that might look like for you down the road. I just want to plead with you to choose chastity and integrity, and make choices that honor both God and yourself."

If she gets defensive and starts pushing back, making comments like, "And you're so perfect yourself?" I would counsel you to not get defensive yourself. Just say something like, "You know, I'm aware that I'm a sinner in need of God's mercy and grace every single day. I would hope that if my eyes were

blinded by my own feelings and sin and I were headed toward a cliff, you would love me enough to warn me and challenge me to live consistently with who God says I am."

I'm so glad you wrote. I hope you find this helpful.

Sue

© 2010 Probe Ministries

"If Judged at Death, Why Judged Later?"

I found your article on what happens at death. My question is, if we are judged at death immediately, why do we say the in the creeds that at the second coming Jesus will judge the quick (living) and the dead since the dead have already been judged? Anxious to hear back from you. Thanks.

Thanks for your letter. There is what some have called a "judgment of faith" which takes place immediately at death and a "judgment of works" which takes place at some time afterward.

The "judgment of faith" may be in view in Hebrews 9:27. A good biblical example is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Notice that the rich man finds himself in "Hades" after death, while Lazarus is in Paradise. This judgment is based on one's relationship with the Lord and has nothing to do with works per se.

However, the Bible also speaks of a "judgment of works." For unbelievers, this judgment will apparently take place just prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth (see

Rev. 20:11 – 21:1). Notice that even death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire at this time (Rev. 20:14). In other words, "Hades" (where the rich man went at death) is not to be equated with the lake of fire (which is where unbelievers will spend eternity after the Great White Throne judgment).

Believers will also experience a "judgment of works" at the judgment seat of Christ (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15). This judgment does not determine whether the person is saved or not, for this judgment only includes those who are already saved. It rather determines whether one will receive eternal rewards or not. Apparently, some believers will not receive any rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). Theologians do not agree on precisely when this judgment will take place. But most believe that it follows the initial "judgment of faith" at some later time. It certainly occurs before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (where resurrected believers will spend eternity in joyful fellowship with God and one another).

Hope this helps clear up some of the confusion.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

© 2008 Probe Ministries

Pop Psychology Myths vs. A Biblical Point of View

Kerby Anderson compares some current myths with a Christian perspective informed by the timeless teaching of the Bible. These "pop psychology" ideas seem to make sense until one compares them with biblical insights from the creator of us

all.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Go into any bookstore and you will see shelves of self-help books, many of which promote a form of "pop psychology." Although these are bestsellers, they are filled with half-truths and myths. In this essay we are going to look at some of these pop psychology myths as exposed by Dr. Chris Thurman in his book *Self-Help or Self-Destruction*. If you would like more information or documentation for the issues we cover in these pages, I would recommend you obtain a copy of his book.

Myth 1: Human beings are basically good.

The first myth I would like to look at is the belief that people are basically good. Melody Beattie, author of the best-seller *Codependent No More*, says that we "suffer from that vague but penetrating affliction, low self-worth." She suggests we stop torturing ourselves and try to raise our view of ourselves. How do we do that? She says: "Right now, we can give ourselves a big emotional and mental hug. We are okay. It's wonderful to be who we are. Our thoughts are okay. Our feelings are appropriate. We're right where we're supposed to be today, this moment. There is nothing wrong with us. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with us."

In other words, Beattie is saying that we are basically good. There is nothing wrong with us. At least there is nothing fundamentally wrong with us. There isn't any flaw that needs to be corrected.

Peter McWilliams, in his best-seller *Life 101*, actually addresses this issue head on. This is what he says in the brief section entitled, "Are human beings fundamentally good or fundamentally evil?"

> My answer: good. My proof? I could quote philosophers,

> psychologists, and poets, but then those who believe humans are fundamentally evil can quote just as many philosophers, psychologists, and poets. My proof, such as it is, is a simple one. It returns to the source of human life: an infant. When you look into the eyes of an infant, what do you see? I've looked into a few, and I have yet to see fundamental evil radiating from a baby's eyes. There seems to be purity, joy, brightness, splendor, sparkle, marvel, happiness—you know: good.
>
> Before we see what the Bible says about the human condition, let me make one comment about Peter McWilliams's proof. While an infant may seem innocent to our eyes, any parent would admit that a baby is an example of the ultimate in selfishness. A baby comes into the world totally centered on his own needs and oblivious to any others.

When we look to the Bible, we get a picture radically different from that espoused by pop psychologists. Adam and Eve committed the first sin, and the human race has been born morally corrupt ever since. According to the Bible, even a seemingly innocent infant is born with a sin nature. David says in Psalm 51:5 "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." The newborn baby already has a sin nature and begins to demonstrate that sin nature early in life. Romans 3:23 tells us that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We are not good as the pop psychologists teach, and we are not gods as the new age theologians teach. We are sinful and cut off from God.

Myth 2: We need more self-esteem and self-worth.

The next myth to examine is the one that claims what we really need is more self-esteem and self-worth. In the book entitled *Self-Esteem*, Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning state, "Self-esteem is essential for psychological survival." They believe that we need to quit judging ourselves and learn to accept

ourselves as we are.

They provide a series of affirmations we need to tell ourselves in order to enhance our self-esteem. First, “I am worthwhile because I breathe and feel and am aware.” Well, shouldn’t that also apply to animals? And do I lose my self-esteem if I stop breathing? In a sense, this affirmation is a take off on Rene Descartes’s statement, “I think, therefore I am.” They seem to be saying “I am, therefore I am worthwhile.”

Second they say, “I am basically all right as I am.” But is that true? Is it true for Charles Manson? Don’t some of us, in fact all of us, need some changing? A third affirmation is “It’s all right to meet my needs as I see fit.” Really? What if I meet my needs in a way that harms you? Couldn’t I justify all sorts of evil in order to meet my needs?

Well, you can see the problem with pop psychology’s discussion of self-esteem. Rarely is it defined, and when it is defined, it can easily lead to evil and all kinds of sin.

It should probably be as no surprise that the Bible doesn’t teach anything about self-esteem. In fact, it doesn’t even define the word. What about the term *self-worth*? Is it synonymous with self-esteem. No, there is an important distinction between the terms *self-esteem* and *self-worth.*

William James, often considered the father of American psychology, defined *self-esteem* as “the sum of your successes and pretensions.” In other words, your self-esteem is a reflection of how you are actually performing compared to how you think you should be performing. So your self-esteem could actually fluctuate from day to day.

Self-worth, however, is different. Our worth as human beings has to do with the fact that we are created in God’s image. Our worth never fluctuates because it is anchored in the fact that the Creator made us. We are spiritual as well as physical beings who have a conscience, emotions, and a will. Psalm 8

says: “You have made him [mankind] a little lower than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands, you have put all things under his feet.”

So the good news is that we bear God’s image, but the bad news is that all of these characteristics have been tainted by sin. Our worth should not be tied up in what we do, but in who God made us to be and what He has done for us.

Myth 3: You can’t love others until you love yourself.

Now I would like to look at the myth that you can’t love others until you love yourself. Remember the Whitney Houston song “The Greatest Love of All?” It says, “Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.”

Peter McWilliams, author of *Life 101*, promotes this idea in his book *Love 101* which carries the subtitle “To Love Oneself Is the Beginning of a Lifelong Romance.” He asks, “Who else is more qualified to love you than you? Who else knows what you want, precisely when you want it, and is always around to supply it?” He believes that the answer to those questions is you.

He continues by saying, “If, on the other hand, you have been gradually coming to the seemingly forbidden conclusion that before we can truly love another, or allow another to properly love us, we must first learn to love ourselves—then this book is for you.” Notice that he not only is saying that you cannot love others until you love yourself, but that you can’t love you *until you learn* to love yourself.

Melody Beattie, author of *CoDependent No More*, believes the same thing. One of the chapters in her book is entitled, “Have a Love Affair With Yourself.” Jackie Schwartz, in her book *Letting Go of Stress*, even suggests that you write a love

letter and “tell yourself all the attributes you cherish about yourself, the things that really please, comfort, and excite you.”

Does the Bible teach self-love? No, it does not. If anything, the Bible warns us against such a love affair with self. Consider Paul’s admonition to Timothy: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

The Bible discourages love of self and actually begins with the assumption we already love ourselves too much and must learn to show sacrificial love (agape love) to others. It also teaches that love is an act of the will. We can choose to love someone whether the feelings are there or not.

We read in 1 John 4, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” The biblical pattern is this: God loves us, and we receive God’s love and are able to love others.

Myth 4: You shouldn’t judge anyone.

Let’s discuss the myth that you shouldn’t judge anyone. No doubt you have heard people say, “You’re just being judgmental” or “Who are you to judge me?” You may have even said something like this.

Many pop psychologists certainly believe that you shouldn't judge anyone. In their book entitled *Self-Esteem*, Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning argue that moral judgments about people are unacceptable. They write: "Hard as it sounds, you must give up moral opinions about the actions of others. Cultivate instead the attitude that they have made the best choice available, given their awareness and needs at the time. Be clear that while their behavior may not feel or be good for you, it is not bad."

So moral judgments are not allowed. You cannot judge another person's actions, even if you feel that it is wrong. McKay and Fanning go on to say why: "What does it mean that people choose the highest good? It means that you are doing the best you can at any given time. It means that people always act according to their prevailing awareness, needs, and values. Even the terrorist planting bombs to hurt the innocent is making a decision based on his or her highest good. It means you cannot blame people for what they do. Nor can you blame yourself. No matter how distorted or mistaken a person's awareness is, he or she is innocent and blameless."

As with many of these pop psychology myths, there is a kernel of truth. True we should be very careful to avoid a judgmental spirit or quickly criticize an individual's actions when we do not possess all the facts. But the Bible does allow and even encourages us to make judgments and be discerning. In fact, the Bible should be our ultimate standard of right and wrong. If the Bible says murder is wrong, it is wrong. God's objective standards as revealed in the Scriptures are our standard of behavior.

How do we apply these standards? Very humbly. We are warned in the gospels "Judge not, that you be not judged." Jesus was warning us of a self-righteous attitude that could develop from pride and a hypocritical spirit. Jesus also admonished us to "take the plank out of [our] own eye" so that we would be able to "remove the speck from [our] brother's eye" (Matt.

7:1-5).

Finally, we should acknowledge that Jesus judged people's actions all the time, yet He never sinned. He offered moral opinions wherever He went. He said, "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). Judging is not wrong, but we should be careful to do it humbly and from a biblical perspective.

Myth 5: All guilt is bad.

Finally, I would like to look at the myth that all guilt is bad. In his best-seller, *Your Erroneous Zones*, Wayne Dyer tackles what he believes are two useless emotions: guilt and worry. Now it is true that worry is probably a useless emotion, but it is another story with guilt. Let's begin by understanding why he calls guilt "the most useless of all erroneous zone behaviors."

Wayne Dyer believes that guilt originates from two sources: childhood memories and current misbehavior. He says, "Thus you can look at all of your guilt either as reactions to leftover imposed standards in which you are still trying to please an absent authority figure, or as the result of trying to live up to self- imposed standards which you really don't buy, but for some reason pay lip service to. In either case, it is stupid, and more important, useless behavior."

He goes on to say that "guilt is not natural behavior" and that our "guilt zones" must be "exterminated, spray-cleaned and sterilized forever." So how do you exterminate your "guilt zones"? He proposed that you "do something you know is bound to result in feelings of guilt" and then fight those feelings off.

Dyer believes that guilt is "a convenient tool for manipulation" and a "futile waste of time." And while that is

often true, he paints with too large of a brush. Some guilt can be helpful and productive. Some kinds of guilt can be a significant agent of change.

The Bible makes a distinction between two kinds of guilt: true guilt and false guilt. Notice in 2 Corinthians 7:10 that the Apostle Paul says, “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

Worldly sorrow (often called false guilt) causes us to focus on ourselves, while godly sorrow (true guilt) leads us to focus on the person or persons we have offended. Worldly sorrow (or false guilt) causes us to focus on what we have done in the past, whereas godly sorrow (or true guilt) causes us to focus on what we can do in the present to correct what we’ve done. Corrective actions that come out of worldly sorrow are motivated by the desire to stop feeling bad. Actions that come out of godly sorrow are motivated by the desire to help the offended person or to please God or to promote personal growth. Finally, the results of worldly and godly sorrow differ. Worldly sorrow results in temporary change. Godly sorrow results in true change and growth.

Pop psychology books are half right. False guilt (or worldly sorrow) is not a productive emotion, but true guilt (or godly sorrow) is an emotion God can use to bring about positive change in our lives as we recognize our guilt, ask for forgiveness, and begin to change.

©1996 Probe Ministries.