Voting and Christian Citizenship

Applying a biblical worldview to your voting choices is an important part of your role as a citizen. Byron Barlowe looks at how Christians should exercise their right to vote and make biblically informed decisions in the voting booth.

Summary

It is both a sacred duty and privilege for Christians to serve as citizens who salt (preserve) and light (illumine) our culture. Americans have inherited a government system based solidly on a biblical worldview, but one that also tolerates and protects other viewpoints. Truly humble, tolerant political engagement does not equal spiritual compromise. Christians found out how seductive political power can be in the 1980s and need to resist the pull of compromise. God doesn't take sides; we need to make sure we're on His side.



Although a strongly biblical candidate may be ideal, that's not often a realistic option. Instead, we must use our sanctified minds to prayerfully choose between imperfect candidates—who are *not*, after all, seeking *pastoral* positions. Believers have a duty to vote our values. How else would we vote? Our calling: not to force those values on others in a free society, but to honor the privileges of citizenship, including legitimate political influence, and to vote our convictions.

Christian Citizenship: A Duty and Privilege

One pundit wrote fifteen months before the 2008 election, "If you're not already weary of the 2008 presidential campaign . . . you must be living in a cave…. The campaign began the day after the 2004 election, making this the first non-stop presidential campaign in history. The media, desperate to sustain interest in the horse race, pursue such earth-shattering stories as: 'Which candidate owns the most pets?'"{1}

Then, a new kind of Internet-age debate featured Democratic presidential candidates responding to home-grown videos posted to *YouTube.com* by members of the public. Among them: two Tennesseans dressed like hillbillies and a snowman, ostensibly concerned about global warming!

Hard to take politics seriously given all of the theater, isn't it? But political engagement—including voting—is a God-given, blood-bought right that Christians must take seriously. We are called by the Lord Jesus to be preserving salt and illuminating light in our culture. And it's not just presidential races that matter.

Kerby Anderson, in an article entitled "Politics and Religion," wrote, "Christian obedience goes beyond calling for spiritual renewal. We have often failed to ask the question, 'What do we do if hearts are not changed?' Because government is ordained of God, we need to consider ways to legitimately use governmental power. Christians have a high stake in making sure government acts justly and makes decisions that provide maximum freedom for the furtherance of the gospel."{2} Some believe we have a *cultural mandate* to redeem not only men's souls, but the works of culture including politics.

Yet, Christians remain on the sidelines in alarming numbers.

According to one poll before the 2004 elections, “only a third of evangelical Christians—those who ought to be most concerned with moral values—[said they would] actually vote.” But the Bible says a lot about believers’ duties as citizens. “When Moses commanded the Israelites to appoint God-fearing leaders, he wasn’t just talking to a handful of citizens who felt like getting involved…. And modern Christians are under the same obligation to choose leaders who love justice…. Today, in our modern democracy, free citizens act as God’s agents for choosing leaders, and we do it by voting.”{3}

As believers, we’re citizens of two kingdoms: one temporal and earthly, the other eternal and heavenly. We are called to participate in both the culture and politics of The City of Man, as this world was called by Augustine, while primarily focusing on the Kingdom of God.

The longevity and value of these dual kingdoms ought to serve as crucial guides to how invested we become in them. Eternal issues matter more than temporal ones. To allow politics and social issues to overtake our commitments to the everlasting is to risk idolatry, while losing ground in both realms.

Flipping the usual focus of candidates’ qualifications onto the electorate, one Christian columnist wrote, “Those who make critical decisions for America (its voters, I mean) should come up to some minimal standards before leaving the house on Election Day. Voters should be able to tell the difference between worldviews…. Voters should be free of regionalism and other types of ‘group-think’…. Vocations, unions, ethnic groups and age groups that vote in lockstep are not behaving as free people. Citizens whose consciences are ruled by others should not govern a free nation… Voters should value their vote, but not sell it.” {4}

It didn’t take Albert Einstein to say it, but he did say “It is the duty of every citizen according to his best capacities to give validity to his convictions in political affairs.”{5}

Chuck Colson, convicted Watergate felon, said, “All you have to do is lose the right to vote once, and you would never again find any excuse for not going into the voting booth…. Be a good citizen: Exercise the greatest right a free people have [*sic*].”{6}

God’s will and Kingdom will not be thwarted, and *we* cannot ultimately control outcomes, even as a voting bloc. As Christian citizens in America, we need to offer due diligence in voting and other political activities, trust God with the results, and keep spiritual concerns first.

Puritan Roots, Pluralism & Practical Politics

In 2007, for the first time a Hindu priest opened Senate deliberations with prayer. I asked a group of Christian homeschool parents gathered to discuss America’s political system if they could justify forbidding this, and no one could answer satisfactorily. Pluralism—when a culture supports various ethnic backgrounds, religions and political views—is a practical and, understood correctly, appropriate reality.

Americans—believers and non-believers alike—have inherited a system of governance based solidly on the Bible, but allowing for a plurality of beliefs or even unbelief. The Puritans who first colonized this land “saw themselves as the new Israel, an elect people.”{7}

The architects of our political arrangement, many of them professing Christians, were deeply influenced by the Puritan’s positive cultural impact and the Scriptures to which they appealed. Daniel Webster said, “Our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment.”{8} John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the

principles of Christianity." George Washington, a devoted Christian, left room for others: "While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support."{9}

Probe's *Mind Games* curriculum points out the realism of the founders in mitigating the imperfections of people even as they self-rule. "Again, we can see the genius of the American system. Madison and others realized the futility of trying to remove passions (human sinfulness) from the population. Therefore, he proposed that human nature be set against human nature. This was done by separating various institutional power structures."{10} This was based on a biblical understanding of man, a proper anthropology.

So, how can such a firmly entrenched Judeo-Christian political heritage be reconciled with a culture increasingly full of Mormons, Hindus, Muslims, humanists, and other unbelievers living alongside Christians?

The Constitution and Bill of Rights justly allows for religious and political diversity. Nineteenth-century theologian Charles Hodge of Princeton regarding immigrants said:

> All are welcomed; all are admitted to equal rights and privileges. All are allowed to acquire property, whatever their religious feelings, and to vote in every election, made eligible to all offices and invested with equal influence in all public affairs. All are allowed to worship as they please, or not to worship at all, if they see fit…. No man is required to profess any form of faith…. More than this cannot reasonably be demanded.{11}

Theologian Richard J. Mouw explored the possibility of evangelical politics that doesn't compromise and at the same is time highly tolerant of other views. Not "anything-goes relativism," but rather confidence that comes from God's

guidebook for life, tempered by fair-minded ways of dealing with people. He wrote, “This humility does not exclude Christians advocating social and political policies that conflict with the views and practices of others. It does mean we should do so in a way that encourages reasonable dialogue and mutual respect.”{12}

Believers need to consider the words of Bernard Crick: “Politics is a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence…. Politics is not just a necessary evil; it is a realistic good.” Kenyans victimized by recent mob killings that erupted after disputed elections could testify that when the political process fails it can be devastating.

The founders, even as they envisioned pluralism, did not themselves have to deal deeply with it. It requires a keen worldview for voting and activism in today’s truly pluralistic America. Our nation is based on an unmistakable Christian foundation, but that of course doesn’t mean you *have to* be a Christian or even believe in God to participate.

Political Might and the Religious Right: Does God Take Sides?

Ever since Jimmy Carter ran for President based partly on his evangelical faith in the 1970s, and then the Moral Majority took the nation by storm in the ‘80s, there has been a non-stop discussion in America surrounding faith and politics.

Political power’s seduction blinded believers, claim former movers and shakers like Ed Dobson. “One of the dangers,” he said, “of mixing politics and religion is that you begin to think the only way to transform culture is by passing another law. Most of what we did in the Moral Majority was aimed at getting the right people elected so that we would have enough votes to pass the right laws.”{13}

In those days, Christians seemed to believe they could legislate and administrate God's kingdom into full flower. However, core issues like gay unions and abortion remain largely unchanged or even worse today.

"History has shown us we can't rely totally on laws," continued Dobson.{14} A good example is Prohibition. The harder the government cracked down on alcohol, the more ways people found to get around the law. One result was increased crime. Laws don't change hearts; they are meant to restrain evil.

Sidling up to political power brokers even for commendable causes can prove disillusioning. Recently, conservative Christians hoped for fair and full consideration from the administration of the boldly evangelical George Bush. According to former White House deputy director for faith-based initiatives David Kuo, administration operators used and mocked evangelicals who were trying to do compassionate work partly funded through the government. But as Kuo asks, "What did they expect from politicos?" Good question for all of us. Jeremiah the prophet warned, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man."{15} That would seem to include man's politics.

Committed evangelical Bill Armstrong shared prophetically as a Senator back in 1983, "There is a danger when believers get deeply involved in political activity that they will try to put the mantle of Christ on their cause . . . to deify that cause and say, 'Because I'm motivated to run for office for reasons [of] faith, a vote for me is a vote for Jesus'."{16}

Ed Dobson often joked about God not being a Democrat or Republican—but *certainly not* a Democrat. But, he asked, "Is God the God of the religious and political left with its emphasis on the environment and the poor, or is he the God of the religious and political right with its emphasis on the unborn and the family? Both groups claim to speak for God."{17}

The Lord appeared to Joshua before a battle. He discovered that the issue wasn't whether God was on his side or his enemy's, but whether the people were on *God's* side. The religious and political Left casts itself as champion of the poor and the environment while the Right emphasizes the unborn and the family. Both say they speak for God. Seeking God's priorities and using His wisdom for our particular times is critical. However, "God's side" is not always easy to find.

So what's a Christian citizen's role? Armstrong and others believe Christians have been commanded by Christ to be involved. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" means more than paying taxes. Some basic biblical principles:

- *All political power comes from God;*
- *Government has a God-ordained role to play in society;*
- *Christians have a God-ordained responsibility to that government: to pray, submit to and honor government leaders and, of course, to pay our taxes.{18}*

The late Christian political activist, pastor, and author D. James Kennedy warned in the heady early days of "the Reagan Revolution" not to trust in the man Ronald Reagan but in God. "After victory," he writes, "many people give up the struggle and later discover they had won only a battle, not the war. Are you working less, praying less, giving less, trusting less? Maybe there is a bit of the humanist in all of us."{19} He continues, "The government . . . should be a means to godly ends. Ronald Reagan is but a stone in the sling, and you do not trust in stones; you trust in the living rock, Jesus Christ."{20}

Thus, voters, campaigners *and* officeholders need to heed the humility of experience in a fallen world and the understanding of the Founders that power corrupts and should be divided up, placing final trust in the Almighty.

Should We Elect a Christian When Given the Chance?

Talk show host Larry King asked pastor and author Max Lucado if religion should matter in an election campaign. I love his answer: "Well, genuine religion has to matter. We elect character. We elect a person's worldview. Faith can define that worldview…. [Within the] American population 85 percent of us say that religion matters to us. 72 percent of us say that the religion of a president matters."{21} Polls show that Americans would sooner elect a Muslim or homosexual than an acknowledged atheist.{22}

Philosopher and early church father Augustine dealt with a culture war among the Romans. In his classic book *The City of God* he taught that "The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt. Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man."{23} Of course, a Christian will want to vote for a citizen of God's city if there is a clear choice between him and a rank sinner. That choice is seldom so clear in elections. But understanding this dual citizenship of the Christian voter herself in the City of Man and The City of God is essential to dissecting complicated, sometimes competing priorities.

In the tangled vines surrounding campaign messages, it's not so simple to discern a candidate's worldview and decide who best matches our own, but that's what wisdom and good stewardship require (and as recent scandals like Senator Larry Craig's alleged homosexual improprieties shows, a politician's stated views and behavior don't always match). Seems like the Christian citizen's top priority, then, is to have a biblical worldview to start with (something that Probe can help with greatly).

Given that, how does the average Christian voter decide on parties, platforms, and candidates? They do it based on principles of biblical ethics, godly values, simple logic and a discerning ear.

Remember, America is a republic, not a democracy. And in a republic we are to elect representatives who will rise above the passions of the moment. They are to be men and women of character and virtue, who will act responsibly and even nobly as they carry out the best interests of the people. No, we don't want leaders we can love because they remind us of our own darker side. We want leaders we can look up to and respect.{24}

Should we elect a person who claims to be a Christian, like former pastor Mike Huckabee? It depends. Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney received a standing ovation when said, "We need a person of faith to lead the country." A contributor to the blog run by Left-wing evangelical Jim Wallis responded, "But that statement is nearly meaningless, for even Sam Harris is a person of faith. Strident, angry, atheistic faith."{25} Good point: all have faith, but *faith in what or who*?

On the other hand, former Senator Bill Armstrong states, "God was able to make sons of Abraham out of stone. Certainly that means he can make a good legislator out of somebody who isn't necessarily a member of our church or maybe not even a Christian or maybe an atheist. So I don't think we ought to limit God by saying 'only Christians' deserve our support politically."{26}

The politically influential Dr. James Dobson caused a stir when he critiqued one candidate for not regularly attending church. Dr. Richard Land responded that this is not a deciding factor for him. He said that as a Baptist minister he would never have voted for the church-attending Jimmy Carter but did vote twice for the non-attending Ronald Reagan. This, like so

many others, seems to be an issue of individual conscience for voters.

Evangelical Mark DeMoss writes in support of Romney, a devout Mormon. “For years, evangelicals have been keenly interested to know whether a candidate shared their faith. I am now more interested in knowing that a president represents my values than I am that he or she shares my theology.”{27} After all, we’ve worked together on issues like abortion, pornography, and gambling. Can’t we be governed well by someone who shares most of our values, he reasons? As columnist Cal Thomas says, I care less about where the ambulance driver worships than if he knows where the hospital is.

Taking the high road of choosing good candidates, not necessarily ones whose theology one agrees with all down the line, makes voting and party affiliation complex for believers. We’d prefer a clean, easy set of choices. But, it appears that even voting and civic engagement is under the “sweat of the brow” curse of Genesis—nothing comes easy.

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias reminds us that we’re NOT electing a minister or church elder. He said:

> I think as we elect, we go before God and [choose] out of the candidates who will be the best ones to represent [sanctity of life] values and at the same time be a good leader . . . whose first responsibility [is] to protect citizens.
>
> What we want is a politician who will understand the basic Judeo-Christian worldview, and on the basis of that the moral laws of this nation are framed, and then run this country with the excellence of that which is recognized in a pluralistic society: the freedom to believe or to disbelieve, and the moral framework with which this was conducted: the sanctity of every individual life.{28}

Vote your conscience. Many issues are disputable matters, as

the Apostle Paul put it. Avoid the temptation to *unreflectively* limit your view to a few pet issues. If over time you prayerfully believe that stewardship of the environment is critical, balanced against all considerations, vote accordingly. If sanctity of life issues like abortion and stem cell research are paramount to you, by all means vote that way. However, realize that trade-offs are inevitable; there won't be a perfect candidate who falls in line on all our values and priorities.

Politics, Religion, and Values

As the old saw goes, "never talk about politics and religion." That may be wise advice when Uncle Harry is over for Thanksgiving dinner. But as a rule of life, it breeds ignorance and passivity in self-government. "Only if we allow a biblical worldview and a biblically balanced agenda guide our concrete political work can we significantly improve the political order," according to a statement by the National Association of Evangelicals.{29} That means dialogue, and that's not easy.

Some prefer a public square where anything goes *but* religion. That would be wrong. Likewise, a so-called "sacred public square," with religious values imposed on everyone, would be unfair. Christians should support a "*civil* public square" with open, respectful debate.{30}

But, you often hear people make statements like, "Christians shouldn't try to legislate morality." They might simply mean you can't make people good by passing laws. Fair enough. But *all law*, divine and civil, involves imposing right and wrong. Prohibitions against murder and rape are judgments on good and bad. The question is not whether we *should* legislate morality but rather, "*What kind* of morality we should legislate?"{31}

Yet tragically, as *iVoteValues.com* discovered, "many believers

don’t even consider their values when voting,” often choosing candidates whose positions are at odds with their own beliefs, convictions, and values. A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study found that *nearly two-thirds* of Americans say their faith has little to do with their voting decisions!{32} Many believers are missing a chance to be salt and light to the watching world.

What about when the field of candidates offers only “the lesser of two evils”? Like when only one candidate is anti-abortion yet she holds to other troubling positions? That requires thoughtful distinctions. If the reason you vote for candidate X is only to avoid the graver consequences of voting for candidate Y, you’re not formally cooperating with evil. In this case, whatever evil comes from the anti-abortion candidate you helped elect due to your convictions would be unintended. Same as if you were a bank teller and the robber demanded, “Give me all the money or I’ll blow this guy’s brains out.” You cooperate to avoid the greater evil, but your intent was not to enable the robbery.{33} It’s hard to argue against this reasoning in a fallen world where even God allows evil for greater purposes.

What about cases when the field of candidates offers only “the lesser of two evils”? For instance, you can’t decide between the more pro-abortion candidate who’s otherwise highly qualified *and* the anti-abortion person who has some real flaws.

Some believe that if you vote for the pro-abortion person for other important reasons, then you are not responsible for abortions that might result, as briefly illustrated above. Others see a necessary connection—vote for a “pro-abort” and you are guilty. Study and pray hard on such issues as God gives freedom of conscience.

Sometimes it comes down to choices we’d rather not make. Only rarely, perhaps, can we say that to abstain from voting is the

only way. Notable Christian author Mark Noll believes this is such a time for him.{34}

Others warn that this only helps elect the candidates with unbiblical values. One commentator wrote, “Voters should not spend their franchise on empty gestures…. No successful politician is as strong on every issue as we would like. Our own pastors and parents can’t pass this test in their much smaller contexts. Rather than striking a blow for purity, we risk giving up our influence altogether when we follow a man with only one or two ‘perfect’ ideas.”{35}

Hold this kind of issue with an open hand. Many change their minds as they age and lose unrealistic youthful idealism. But if God gives a clear conviction, again, stick with that value or candidate. Only seek the difference between legalism and God’s leading.

Some more left-leaning evangelicals like Ron Sider and Jim Wallis value helping the poor and dispossessed through government, while critics claim that as the Church’s exclusive role. The retort: the Church is failing in its duty and it’s a fulfillment of the Church’s duty to advocate for government intervention. Others focus on sanctity of life issues not only as a higher priority, but as part of the government’s biblically mandated task of protecting its citizenry. What is your conviction? Best be deciding if you don’t know yet.

The purple ink-stained fingers of Iraqi citizens who voted at their own risk for the first time in decades testify to the precious privilege of voting in a free society. Americans gave blood and treasure to free them. Don’t let the same sacrifice made by our ancestors on our behalf go to waste. Inform yourself. “Study to show yourself approved” not only regarding Scripture, but as a citizen of The Cities of Man and of God.

Notes

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25. Tony Jones, "Honest Questions About Mitt Romney," http://tinyurl.com/3d8dm8, February 21, 2007.

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27. Mark DeMoss, "Why evangelicals could support this Mormon," *The Politico*, April 24, 2007.

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31. Ibid.

32. "How You Can Have Maximum Patriotic Impact-Brief," *iVoteValues.com*, http://tinyurl.com/2uot68, see point #3.

33. See an insightful application of this line of reasoning in Nathan Schlueter, "Drawing Pro-Life Lines," *First Things*, October 2001, tinyurl.com/6godf.

34. For a defense of his personal decision to abstain from voting in the 2004 major election, see Mark Noll, "None of the above: why I won't be voting for president," Christian Century, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_19_121/ai_n6355192.

35. Gary Ledbetter, "Who should vote?"

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Is Jesus the Only Way? – Part 2

Paul Rutherford explains how reason, Christ's resurrection, and the Bible all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.



I can't drive around town seven days straight without passing at least one car with a bumper sticker that reads, "Coexist" on the back. You know the one. It spells the word using symbols associated with the world's faiths, ancient and modern.



The popularly held mantra is that “all religions are equally valid ways to heaven.” This is what’s called pluralism. So is there room in this brave new world for the words of an ancient and historically respected faith?

Jesus once said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) That sounds offensive and inflammatory today. I will remind you that Jesus said it, not me.

Even more important is the truth question. It is perhaps even more offensive! Are Jesus’ words true?

I fully acknowledge even the question itself may strike you as antiquated, out of date. Perhaps I sound to you like an eccentric, soured-up, fuddy-duddy. I may be. But if the words of Jesus are true, then far more than your offended sense of style is at stake here. Far, far more.

So listen up. And take note because this crazy sounding first-century Jewish rabbi made some crazy-big statements about the nature of man, the nature of reality, and how to live the good life, here, now, and forever. Does that at least sound appealing to you? If even just for the sake of a little controversy?

Explore with me the words of this rabbi. In this article we’ll think through three reasons you should agree with him. And maybe you’ll even find eternal life in the process. If you’re a long-time listener to Probe radio, or a regular listener, this may sound familiar. I have another program exploring the position that Jesus is the only way to God. This one is part two. In this one I give you three reasons Jesus is in fact the

only way to heaven. In the previous program, I defended Jesus' statement against three lines of criticism. So in the next sections I'll explain how reason, the resurrection, and the Word all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Jesus the Only Way Because of Reason

Western culture today is more pluralistic and secular than ever before. This means at least in one small part, that people believe multiple religions lead to heaven. Western culture has been moving this way for some decades. Now it has reached mainstream. Pop culture increasingly accepts this. It is therefore so much more important to consider this exclusive claim Jesus made. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6)

This is an increasingly unpopular teaching. Before I defend it, allow me to clarify. It was made by the Lord Jesus himself. I didn't make it up. I am merely defending it.

So today I want to talk about how it is reasonable to believe this statement—why it is that you should yourself believe Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Today's reason is logic itself. I will base this conclusion on two points: first, that the belief in one God is more logically defensible than believing in multiple creator gods; and second, that the belief in Jesus Christ as God is more reasonable than claims to deity made by others.

The first point is that believing in one creator God is more reasonable than believing in multiple. The god Aristotle believed in (the unmoved mover) was eternally simple. That is, at the root of all things is ultimately one thing—one cause, one source, one origin to which all other things owe their existence.{1} This position beautifully avoids the difficulty of what philosophers call *reductio ad absurdum*—or the problem of infinite regression—or the problem of which came first, the

chicken or the egg? The search for the first, original, or ultimate source, does not continue on and on forever. It cannot.

The second point is that Jesus is the most reasonable candidate for divinity. I respect the Buddha. But he never claimed to be God. Neither did Mohammad. Jesus was very clear. He claimed to be God.

Consider His teachings. They have not been surpassed in excellence in the two millennia that have passed since He walked the earth. Consider His actions. History's best biographies about the man Jesus, record Him loving His enemies, healing the sick, and showing compassion to outcasts. Jesus' life exemplified extraordinary moral rectitude.

I conclude, therefore, that it is more reasonable to believe Jesus is the only way to God given that it is more reasonable to believe in only one creator God, and given that Jesus has the best case for divinity among man's founders of faith.

Jesus the Only Way Because of the Resurrection

We have a saying in American culture that nothing is certain but death and taxes. So if the taxman doesn't come to call, the grim reaper will eventually. Death finds each of us, so we must face our own mortality.

By the best historical accounts Jesus also died and was buried, just like so many of His human brothers before Him.{2} But Jesus, on the other hand, experienced something unique, declaring Him God above all others.

I speak, of course, of resurrection.{3} Jesus Christ is the only person ever to have raised up Himself from the dead of his own volition, and by His own power.

This one point may be the most compelling of the three I offer

this week. It is perhaps the most intuitive case for Jesus being the only way to Heaven. If Jesus really died and raised Himself from the dead, then His power exceeds those of any other man before Him, or after, for
that matter. Surely He must be God.

No other religious figure can make that claim. In a class by Himself, Jesus reigns over all the founders of world religions. Muhammad's burial site is a common tourist destination in Saudi Arabia for contemporary pilgrims. Buddha's cremation site is in northern India. No such site exists today in contemporary Israel for Jesus. His body has no confirmed remains.

The tomb is empty. That much is clear. Records indicate He definitely died and was buried. The empty tomb demands an explanation. Resurrection makes the most sense. Jesus is the only way because He is the only one who has died and raised himself up to new life.

We have several excellent articles at our website devoted to just this topic.{4} Go check them out for more detail. Jesus is who He said he is, "The way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) So the question is, do you want some? Believe in Jesus today by faith.

Jesus the Only Way Because the Word Declares It

Western culture today increasingly accepts the belief that multiple religions are equally valid and they are all ways to eternal life. I propose to you today another reason to believe something
diametrically opposed to this—namely that the Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible, is the only way to eternal life. As the gospel writer John quoted Him, He is, the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him.

This third and final line of reasoning that Jesus is the only way to eternal life, springs from the Bible—from the very word of God itself.

You may not accept the Bible as God's word. That's ok. Just hear me out. Let me explain how this line of reasoning at least makes sense. Then after you've heard it, you can judge for yourself if it's true or not.

So first, the Bible claims to be God's word (2 Timothy 3:16). If we therefore assume the very commonly held conception that God is good and perfect, then that includes the words He speaks as well. So if He speaks good words, then those words must be true. They must accurately describe reality.

The Bible also makes this claim. Jesus in a famous prayer to the Father asks him to sanctify His disciples with the truth before stating, "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) It's a profound statement.

So if God's word is true, and God says in His word that Jesus is, in fact, the only way to God—that none can come to Him except by Jesus, then that means it's true. See how simple that is?

But this statement is also made in another part of the Bible, Acts 4:12. Peter and John have been arrested and are being examined by the Jewish leaders. Peter declares Jesus to them and explains, "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved."

I fully admit this line of reasoning rests on you acknowledging the authority of the Bible—in which case you may not have needed to be convinced in the first place. But if you had not already been convinced of the truth of God's word, I am very sincerely relying on the power of the Spirit at work in you to believe this truth. (Isaiah 55:11)

Conclusion

In this article we considered the truth of a controversial claim. It might be one of the most hotly contested claims in religion today—that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

This is not popular these days in America, Europe, anywhere in the English speaking West, or the non-English speaking West. To hear responses to criticisms against the claim, check out part one of this two part series.

Jesus was Himself no stranger to controversy. He died a criminal's death at the hands of His enemies. He was killed and buried. The Jewish and Roman leaders were smugly satisfied they'd dispatched this unquiet voice.

But when Jesus' enemies attempt to end his earthly ministry, they unknowingly ushered in a spiritually unending ministry of atonement and reconciliation. By his death Jesus paid the price of sin—death—satisfying the just wrath of God. Jesus made peace with God on your
behalf. Believe in Him by faith today and you can have peace with God. Would you like to have peace with him? Tell Him right now. Use your voice or pray silently. But tell Him. Go ahead.

The only thing required of you to receive eternal life is to believe Jesus is Lord. One of Jesus' most famous sayings is, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Confess this belief with your mouth that Jesus Christ is God and believe in your heart that God has raised up his Son from the dead. And you can be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Jesus is the only way to God because there is no other way to get to God but by Jesus. Mankind is imperfect. You are dead in your transgressions and sins. The only way to satisfy God's

holy wrath is to give Him what is due: death. Jesus died that death for you. He's the only one who could ever have paid your debt. And He did.

Human reason leads us to this beautiful conclusion that Jesus is the only way. God has declared it himself clearly in his divinely inspired book—the Bible. His resurrection seals it.

If you believed this for the first time today you are now heir to an eternal throne. Pick up a Bible and read Jesus' life story in the book of John. Tell a friend who's a Christian. Make plans to join them at their church Sunday. Keep praying and reading the Bible. You can discover the wonderful adventure of life in Jesus Christ, the only way to God.

Notes

1. Metaphysics, Lambda.
2. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
3. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20
4. Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective;
What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?;
The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
– A Real Historical Event;
The Answer Is the Resurrection

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Is Jesus the Only Way?

Paul Rutherford explains why Jesus is the only way to know God.



I was sitting in my car at a red light and I saw a bumper sticker on the car in front of me that said, “Coexist.” Only, the letters on the bumper sticker are religious symbols. A crescent stands in place of the letter “c,” a peace symbol in place of the letter “o,” and some of the other symbols included a cross, a Star of David, and a yin-yang, all used to create the word “coexist.”

Perhaps you’ve seen an image just like this bumper sticker, but on a t-shirt or tattoo. It represents a common sentiment in our culture that everyone should get along, or coexist peacefully. And I love that sentiment. We *should* get along. In fact, I’m grateful to God I live in a country in which an unprecedented number of people from all different religions, backgrounds, and ethnicities do, in fact, coexist every day, and for the most part without violent protest. The life we enjoy in the United States is historically unprecedented.



But the coexistence advocated in *this* bumper sticker is something more subtle. It’s a way of getting along that is more than meets the eye. It frequently calls for a peaceable lifestyle free of conflict between faiths. People hope that we can all unite in a single brotherhood and celebrate our differences, particularly religious ones. They don’t understand why we bicker over who’s right and who’s wrong.

The call to coexist is a reaction to the exclusive truth claims of religion, especially Christianity. In fact, its exclusivism is the most offensive aspect of Christianity today. “Repent. Believe. Come to Jesus. He’s the only way!”

These are phrases easily associated with Christianity, especially street preaching. What should we do with Christianity's exclusivism in a twenty-first century cosmopolitan society? Haven't we progressed beyond such narrow-mindedness in these modern times? Isn't claiming Jesus as the only way intolerant of other faiths? Don't those Christians know all religions are equally valid paths to heaven? They shouldn't force their beliefs on others!

Claiming Jesus is the only way to heaven *is* exclusive, I admit. It says there is no other way to God except by trust in Jesus Christ. Jesus most famously says this Himself in the Bible: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

Even though it's offensive, I believe Jesus really is the only way to God. In this article we're going to explore that question by discussing objections to it, and discover why He really *is* the only way.

Tolerance

As believers, when we claim Jesus is the only way, you often hear people give some variation of, "That's so intolerant!" In doing so, they reject the claim. Often implied, but not said straight out, is the demand that the Christian "tolerate" others' beliefs, or take back what he just said.

It's worth pointing out that claiming Christianity to be intolerant is itself an intolerant claim. But the notion of tolerance is complex and has a long history. And rather than elaborate that contradiction, let's begin by exploring the complexity of tolerance.

What's usually meant by tolerance these days is including beliefs that include all others. This position generally rejects Jesus as the only way because diversity and equality are now celebrated as the highest values. "Tolerance"

celebrates differences of religions and equality of opportunity to practice them. To claim Jesus is the only way squelches both equality and diversity by claiming only one religion is right. Since squelching diversity and equality are socially unacceptable, the exclusivity of Jesus isn't tolerated.

But this issue is complex. (That might be apparent already.) Truth and tolerance are actually linked. In fact, tolerance relies on truth. In the book *The Truth about Tolerance,* David Couchman says, "If there is no real truth, there is no reason for me to be tolerant. Without some kind of beliefs which cause me to value you as a person, even though I disagree with you, why should I be tolerant towards you?"{1} For tolerance to exist at all, it relies upon a framework of truth. That resonates with an idea mentioned earlier, how intolerance contradicts itself.

But the rabbit hole goes even deeper. Truth also relies upon tolerance. "[I]t is also the case that truth as a reflective goal for individuals and communities. . .needs a context of right-minded toleration to flourish in."{2} Without tolerance, truth likewise becomes the hammer of oppression. We find then that truth and tolerance go hand in hand.

Nevertheless, tolerance is the hammer of choice in culture today. Too often suppression of Christians sharing the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation is justified in the name of tolerance. Don't be taken captive by this distortion. Genuine tolerance acknowledges all positions, even those that are exclusive. A biblical worldview holds only one truth, Jesus is the only path to heaven, while maintaining respect and dignity for those who disagree. That's genuine tolerance.

Absolutes Don't Exist

Here is another objection you might hear: Christians can't

claim Jesus is the only way because there are no absolutes. What Christians claim is an absolute truth. And there simply *are* no absolute truths.

Their justification goes like this. We know from study, from reason, from the postmodern era, that society has moved beyond absolutes. There is no absolute truth. There is no overarching metanarrative (or idea of truth) which can transcend culture, nation, or time. Truth is a construct created by each man, each culture, and bound by the strictures of the time in which it was created.

This objection shares a similar weakness to the tolerance objection. Denying absolutes is also self-defeating. It contradicts itself. If we were to ask this objector if she really believed what she was saying was true, we could ask her, "You believe no absolute truth exists, right? Are you absolutely sure of that?" This objector would have to agree. That's what the position holds, thus contradicting her own claim.

This objection often comes out of the postmodern school of thought, which says there is no such thing as objective truth, such as 2 + 2 always equals 4. Postmodern thought also denies the meaningfulness of history along with the ability to interpret literature in a unified and meaningful way. The unfortunate consequence is that we're left with a bleak reality stripped of purpose or meaning, which frankly, isn't very appealing. Without truth, meaning, history, or purpose, what's the point?

The great irony of it all is that postmodern thought arrives at its conclusions by way of reason, which it then concludes isn't true, and then holds it in contempt. It calls into question reason itself and the whole Enlightenment project along with it. So there's a healthy dose of despair that frequently accompanies adherents to postmodern thought, including our friends who don't believe Jesus can be the only

way to God because there are no absolutes. But that's the lie to which I don't want you to be taken captive. Jesus really is the only way. He's the only way to find peace in a wrecked world. He is meaning for a confused life. And He leads us home to heaven out of a world where we don't belong. The remedy to that despair is Jesus.

Despair at the failure of reason to improve mankind is the sad but ultimate end of every god which usurps the rightful place of the one true God: Jesus Christ. The truth is, all gods fail, disappoint, and leave us desperate. The only one who is faithful is Jesus. (cf. Deut. 7:9; 2 Thess. 3:3) But we won't find that satisfaction until we rest assured in the truth that Jesus really is the only way.

Pluralism

There is another category of objectors to Christ's claim to exclusivity. A difficult but less in-your-face objection is pluralism. Pluralism is the belief that any variety of beliefs and values are all equally true and valid.

When I claim Jesus is the only way, some calmly object. Pluralists tend to be more laid-back. Typically they affirm my right to follow Christ, even celebrate it. These folks calmly share their belief that all religions are right: they all lead to god. Often they cite the Eastern proverb that there are many paths to the top of the mountain.

First, I'd like to point out that pluralism is intellectually lazy. It doesn't take seriously the law of non-contradiction. (This law says that two opposite things cannot both be true at the same time and in the same way.) When a Christian claims the path is exclusive, that Jesus is the only way, the pluralist might think, "That's nice, but actually, I know that all religions lead to heaven." He doesn't accept the Christian's position as true. He says he believes Christianity

is true while at the same time denying its central tenet, which is that Jesus is the only way.

But this response is not unique to Christianity. A conservative Jew sincere about his faith won't say any path leads to heaven; neither will a Sunni Muslim. Pluralism attempts to make peace where there is none, and only succeeds in agreeing with no one.

Second, Christians who hold to exclusivism are sometimes falsely accused of pushing their beliefs on others. In condemning the exclusivist claims of Christianity, the pluralist imposes *her* beliefs on the Christian. It contradicts the very intended principle.

We all have beliefs or actions we want others to take seriously. There's nothing wrong with that. From my experience, pluralism is usually based on fear, which is completely understandable. The other person disagrees but fears conflict. They fear the relationship might be at stake if they express their true belief. As believers we still accept and honor people even if they don't agree with us. This is how we alleviate fear, demonstrating acceptance for those with whom we disagree. (And that's the true meaning of tolerance, by the way.)

When someone throws up this smokescreen in conversation, it can feel scary—alarming. Suddenly, the person you're talking to gets defensive. We can wonder, "Where did this come from?" In that moment it's probably not wise to press. Ask them why they believe that way, or affirm them. Certainly no one has a right to force compliance on another unwillingly. Communicate that we don't have to agree to be accepted. Further, don't fall prey to this area where culture takes many believers captive. Jesus is the only way. Stand fast.

The Only Way

Is Jesus the only way? Yes. Multiple scriptures teach this truth. Let's consider a few.

Matthew 11:27 says, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Jesus is claiming that God his Father has handed everything over to Him. This is an indirect claim to be God Himself. But Jesus also makes it clear He is the only one, since no one knows the Father but the Son.

Let's also consider John's gospel. Before Jesus even began his ministry John the Baptist responds to Jesus' identity. "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) In Hebrew culture at the time, calling someone the Lamb of God was a claim to the Messiah who was prophesied (Isaiah 53:7). Further, only God has the power to take away sin. This was an unmistakable claim to divinity. It's interesting also that Jesus doesn't correct him, or deny Godhood. On the contrary, a short time later, Jesus picks up his first two disciples and encourages them, saying, "Come and you will see" (John 1:39).

It's one thing to claim divinity and yet another to claim to be the *only* divinity. So, where does the Bible say Jesus is the only way? As we mentioned earlier, by Jesus' own admission He is the only way to God in John 14:6–"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Peter also explains the meaning of Jesus' exclusivity in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Believers, take heart. Jesus Christ is the one and only way. Questioning Jesus' exclusivity is a recent historical phenomenon. That question is commonly asked in the 20th

century West, a culture increasingly influenced by postmodern thinking and multiculturalism. Take courage. We who accept the exclusivity of Christ are in a historical majority. Repudiation for Christians as being intolerant, exclusive, or uneducated is a recent occurrence. These are the current trends of our culture. Don't be taken captive. Jesus is the only way.

Notes

1. David Couchman, quoted in *The Truth about Tolerance*, Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti, (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 75.

2. Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance*, (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 75.

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Religious Trends Over the Last Decade

Probe VP Steve Cable examines some of the findings of the Probe Survey 2020: The Changing Face of Christianity in America.

Religious Trends Over the Last Fifty Years

In late 2020, Probe administered a new survey{1} to over 3,000 Americans ages 18 through 55 as a follow up to our 2010 survey{2}. Comparing these two surveys reveals a striking decline in Christian religious beliefs and practice across America over the last decade. Before focusing on these

changes, let's begin with a foundational question.

How have young adult religious affiliations changed over the last five decades?



As documented in the General Social Surveys{3} from 1970 through 1990, their religious affiliations remained fairly constant. Since then, there have been significant changes.

The most dramatic change is found in young adults under thirty who select a non-Christian affiliation. This group grew from about one fifth of the population in 1990 to almost half today. Those non-Christians from other religious faiths{4} such as Judaism, Islam, and Mormonism, grew slightly up to about 10% of the U.S. young adult population. At the same time, **the Unaffiliated (i.e. Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing in Particular) almost tripled** to over a third of the population. Among the Unaffiliated, the Nothing in Particular category had by far the largest growth. The Pew Research surveys show an even greater increase, growing from 27% in 1996 to 59% in 2020.

Now bringing in the data from GSS 2010 survey, we learn that 26% of those in their twenties were Unaffiliated in 2010, growing to 30% of those in their thirties in 2018. This result means that more people in their twenties became Unaffiliated in their thirties. This result runs directly counter to the supposition of many that the growth in Unaffiliated would dissipate as young adults age and return to churches to raise their families.

Conversely, **Christian groups declined** with Other Protestants{5} dropping by half, from about one in four down to less than one in eight young adult Americans. Catholics also experienced major losses, dropping by one quarter down to less than one in five young adult Americans over this thirty-

year period.

Although less affected, the Evangelical affiliation also experienced a drop in recent years. GSS reported a small decline in young adult, born again Protestants, from about one in four down to around one in five Americans. Pew Research{6} reported a steeper decline in young adult Evangelicals, from 28% in 2007 down to 20% in 2019.

Perhaps this decline is a winnowing out of those whose Christian beliefs are not vital to their lives. In which case, a greater percentage of born again Christians should hold a strong biblical worldview now in 2020 than in 2010. In the next section, we will explore this topic to find out the truth of the matter.

Born Again Young Adults and a Biblical Worldview

In the next sections, we will be focusing on Born Again Christians in our Probe results. A Born Again Christian is someone who says:

1. I have made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in my life today and
2. I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

We can compare the responses of Born Again Christians to those of Other Protestants and Catholics.

What portion of these three groups have a Basic Biblical Worldview strongly affirming that:

1. God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator who rules the world today.{7}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.
3. A person cannot be good enough to earn a place in heaven.

4. While on earth, Jesus committed no sins like other people do.

All four concepts above are key components of God's redemptive plan. For example, Jesus being sinless made it possible for his death to redeem us.{8} Or, if the Bible is inaccurate in some of its teachings how could we know that it is correct in teaching about redemption?

In 2020 for those ages 18 through 39, one of four Born Again Christians, one of twenty Other Protestants and one of one hundred Catholics affirmed all four of these foundational beliefs. The statement least likely to be affirmed by all three groups was "a person cannot earn a place in heaven". Perhaps many have been influenced by the current postmodern thinking that what's not true for you can be true for someone else.

Only Born Again Christians had a sizable minority of one fourth affirming this worldview. In contrast, nearly half of Born Again Christians affirmed it in 2010. Clearly, this last decade had a serious impact on the perception of what it means to be a Christian.

We see a similar drop when comparing those ages 18 to 29 in 2010 with the same cohort now 30 to 39 in 2020, once again belying the notion that young adults will return to a conservative faith in their thirties. Instead of a noticeable increase as the cohort aged, we see a sizeable drop in those who affirm these key Christian doctrinal statements.

As the percent of true Christians drops, the ability to reach out with the gospel is surely reduced. However, Christians in the Roman Empire in AD 60 were an even smaller portion. Three hundred years later virtually the entire empire was nominally Christian. If we "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light{9}," God will bring many to repentance.

Born Again Young Adults and Pluralism

Pluralism is the belief that there are multiple ways to be right with God. **Pluralism and Christianity are not compatible**. Jesus clearly stated, "*No one comes to the Father except through me*."{10} The
high price paid through Jesus' life and death excludes the possibility of Jesus being one of several options. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "*There is salvation in no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved*."{11}

What does Probe's new survey reveal about pluralism? Confronted with the statement, "Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God," how did American Christians respond? Do they align with clear biblical teaching by strongly disagreeing? For those ages 18 through 39, we found that about one third of Born Again Christians, one in eight Other Protestants, and one in twenty Catholics did so. An overwhelming majority of Christians chose to accept a belief that devalues the death and resurrection of our Lord. Once again, only Born Again Christians had a sizeable minority of one third who agreed with Jesus and the New Testament.

Looking back to 2010, was there a significant change among Born Again Christians during this decade? For the same age group, the percent in 2010 strongly disagreeing was almost one half, compared to the one third in 2020. So, more Christians than ever have no reason to share their faith with people of other religions. As the need for evangelism increases, the number of Christians who believe evangelism is even needed by people of other religions decreases.

The age group 18 to 29 saw 45% choosing a non-pluralist view in 2010 with that same age cohort (now 30 to 39) dropping to 35% in 2020. Once again, we see that as Born Again Christians are maturing, more of them are abandoning rather than clinging to the strong truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To counter this slide with the young adults we know, please:

1. Pray for the Lord to send laborers into the harvest, opening their to the infinite value of the gospel.

2. Explain that the chasm is so great only God can make a way of reconciliation. As Paul wrote, *"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, Jesus . . . who gave himself as a ransom for all . . ."*
{12}

3. Explain that your accepting pluralism will not get your non-Christian friends into heaven. Only the truth of Christ presented to them by willing lips has power over their eternal destiny.

Young Adults and Jesus Our Savior

Probe's new survey shows that professing to be born again does not equate to orthodox biblical beliefs. In this section, we will see this borne out in beliefs about Jesus Christ.

First, why did Jesus die on a cross? The Bible is clear Jesus chose the cross**. "He did it to redeem us by taking our sins and our punishment upon Himself."** Close to nine out of ten 18- to 39-year-old, Born Again Protestants selected this answer.{13} All Christian leaders should want their people to know Jesus' role in their redemption, even those with a works-based gospel. Yet less than two thirds of Other Protestants and Catholics selected that answer.

Many said either the Jewish or Romans leaders caused Jesus' death. But Christians should know that prior attempts by those groups were supernaturally thwarted.

Second, "Jesus will return to this earth to save those who

await his coming."

This statement comes from scripture, *" . . . so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, . . . to save those eagerly waiting for him."*{14} As you can see, this verse answers both questions. The apostle Paul wrote, *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ will rise first."*{15}

Around two thirds of Born Again Protestants strongly agree that Jesus will return to save. Apparently, the remaining third are not sure.

For other Christian groups, only about one third of them strongly agreed.

The third question is: "When he lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people."

The Bible clearly states, *"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."*{16} God laid our sins upon Jesus in his earthly death. If Jesus were a sinner like you and I, His death would have been for His own sin.

Once again, about one third of Born Again Protestants did not select Disagree Strongly. Having this large group who don't understand biblical Christianity is disappointing.

Young adult Born Again Protestants drop down to about one half when looking at **all three questions together**. It appears the other half are trusting Jesus to save them, without a good understanding of who Jesus is. All other Christian groups drop to one in ten or less professing these truths about Jesus.

Finally, we find nine out of ten people with a Basic Biblical Worldview also select a biblical answer for the three Jesus questions. This shows a strong correlation between a Basic Biblical Worldview and an understanding of Jesus' purpose.

Are the Unaffiliated Uncommitted Christians?

In this section we will access Probe's 2020 survey to learn about those identifying as Agnostic or Nothing in Particular. We will call them AGNIPS. Perhaps, as some have suggested, a significant percentage are really Christians not affiliated with any denomination.

Among those ages 18 through 39, one in five are AGNIPS. About one third of these were Protestants as children but only three out of one hundred profess to being born again. So, it appears unlikely that any significant portion of the AGNIPS are latent Born Again Christians.

Of course, many people professing to be Christians do not qualify as Born Again. So perhaps many AGNIPS are latent Other Protestants or Catholics. Let's look at three different metrics to see if this proposition is supported by data.

First, look at a nominal level of religious activity: pray at least daily and read your Bible at least weekly. I think anyone not doing these has little interest in their faith. For this young adult segment, 35% of Born Again Christians and almost 30% of Other Protestants and Catholics *but* less than 5% of AGNIPS perform these activities. Compared to professing Christians, the AGNIPS have very few doing these activities.

Looking only at AGNIPS who were affiliated with a Protestant faith as a child, we find only 3% performing these activities.

A second metric: how about those who believe God is creator and active in the world and do not believe good works will get them into heaven? We find: 33% Born Again Christians, 4% Other Protestants and Catholics, around 0.5% of all AGNIPS and only 0.4% of AGNIPS with a childhood Protestant affiliation.

Finally, of those who strongly agrees with the statement, "I

believe that the only path to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ." Once again: 64% of Born Again Christians, 28% of Other Protestants and Catholics, 5% of all AGNIPS and 5% of AGNIPS with a childhood Protestant affiliation.

All of these metrics agree that very few young adults who are Agnostics or Nothing in Particular appear to have latent Christian beliefs. Even those who were affiliated with a Protestant church as a child did not have a higher level of affiliation with Christian beliefs.

Over this last decade, among Born Again Christians, a basic biblical worldview and understanding of Jesus is decreasing while pluralism is increasing. And the growing AGNIP population is far removed from Christian thought. Those who follow Christ, must respond by speaking the truth about Christ in our churches, our neighborhoods, and the world. We cannot expect any of these groups to just come back to a solid Christian belief. We must reach out to them.

Notes

1. Our new 2020 survey looks at Americans from 18 through 55 from all religious persuasions. Although still focused on looking at religious beliefs and attitudes toward cultural behaviors, we expanded the scope surveying 3,106 Americans ages 18 through 55. Among those responses, there are 717 who are Born Again allowing us to make meaningful comparisons with our 2010 results while also comparing the beliefs of Born Again Christians with those of other religious persuasions.
2. Our previous survey, the 2010 Probe Culturally Captive Christians survey, was limited to Born Again American's ages 18 through 40. This survey of 817 people was focused on a obtaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs and behaviors of young adult, Born Again Christian Americans. For a detailed analysis of the outcomes of our 2010 survey and other surveys from that decade, go to our book Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behavior of American Young Adults

3. General Social Survey data was downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the National Opinion Research Center.
4. Note that the Other Religions category includes Christian cults (e.g. Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses), Jews, and other world religions.
5. Protestants who did not profess to being born again
6. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014, Religious Knowledge Survey 2019 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
7. 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.
- Don't know

8. See for example 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15
9. 1 Peter 2:9
10. John 14:6
11. Acts 4:12
12. 1 Timothy 2:4-6
13. Other answers included:

- He threatened the Roman authority's control over Israel.
- He threatened the stature of the Jewish leaders of the day.

• He never died on a cross.
• He failed in his mission to convert the Jewish people into believers.
14. Hebrews 9:27-28 ESV
15. 1 Thessalonians 4:16
16. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NET

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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

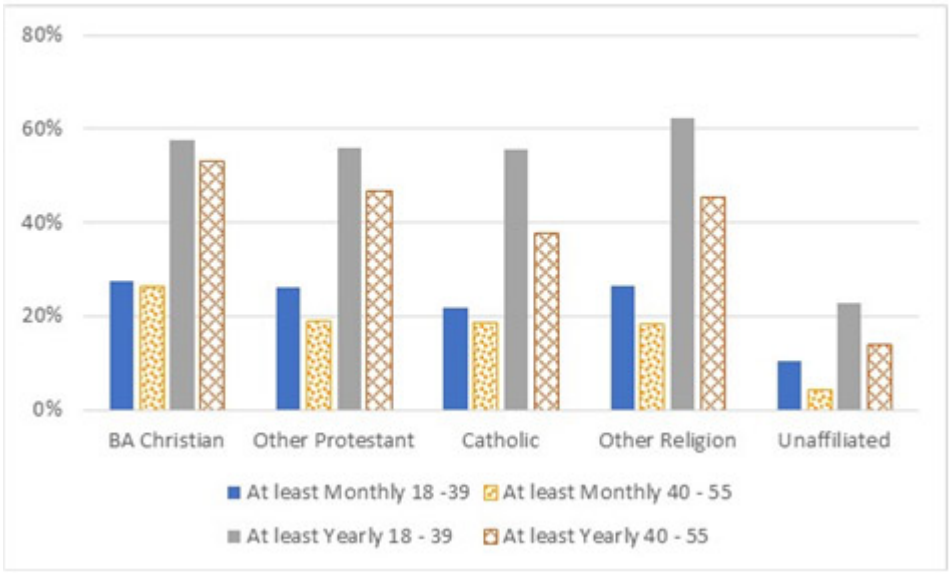


Table 1 below shows several estimates as to how many people are the recipients of these "*intentional spiritual conversations*" in a given year. The different levels shown are based on different assumptions as to how often they share with the same person and how many people they share with in a year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

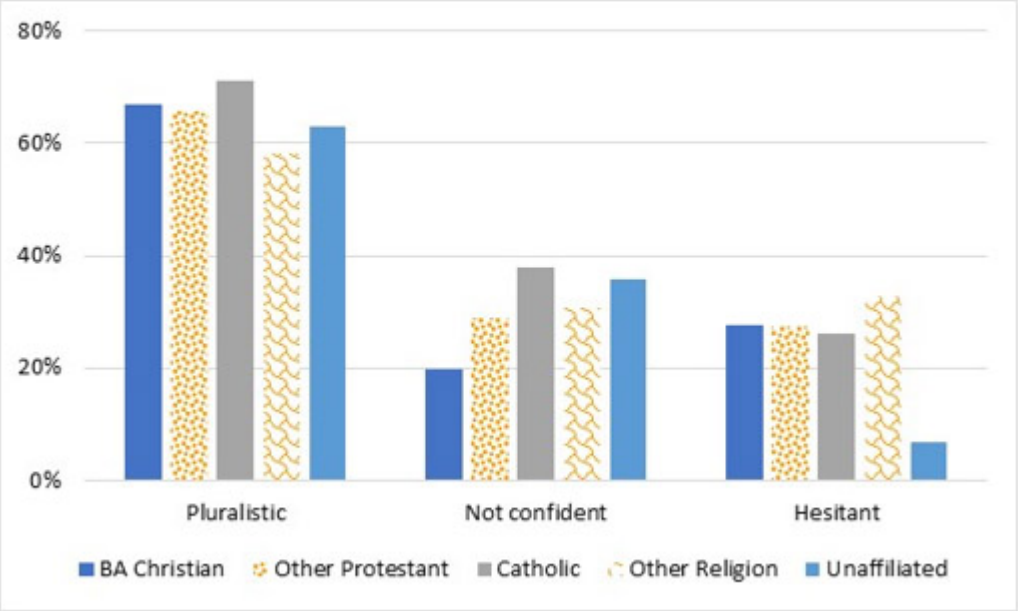
Among Born Again Christians, we project they are sharing their faith with between 25 million and 100 million nonbelievers. However, they are sharing ineffectively with the number being shared with far exceeding the growth rate of evangelicals in America. So, pastors and parachurch organizations need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

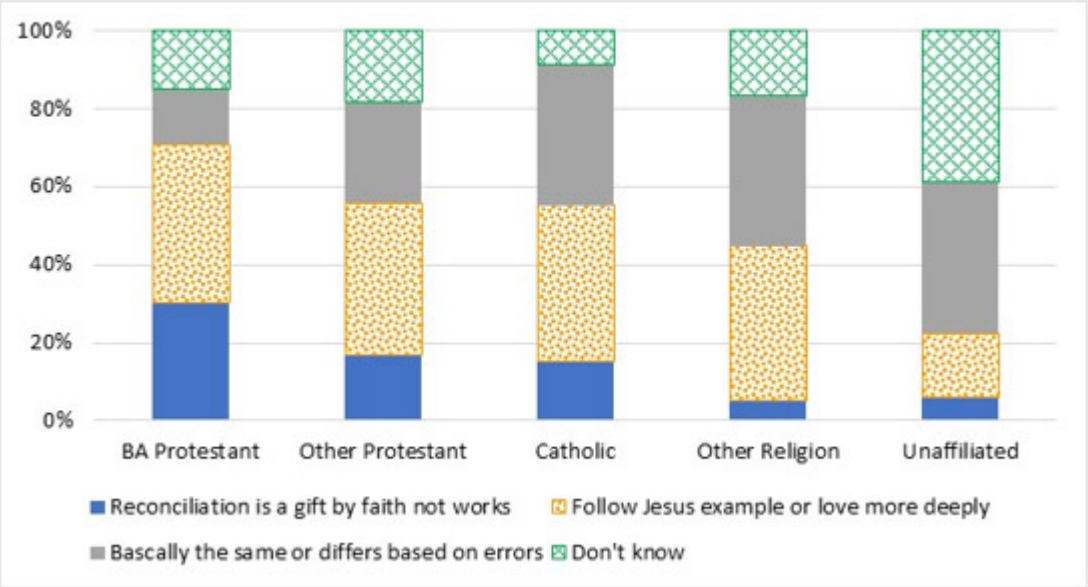
Note that answers 1, 5 and 6 indicate an ignorance about the tenets of Christianity and/or the tenets of other major world religions. As noted earlier, Christianity teaches a way to reconciliation that is very different from other world religions and is not compatible with the reconciliation stories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

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

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

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

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

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

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

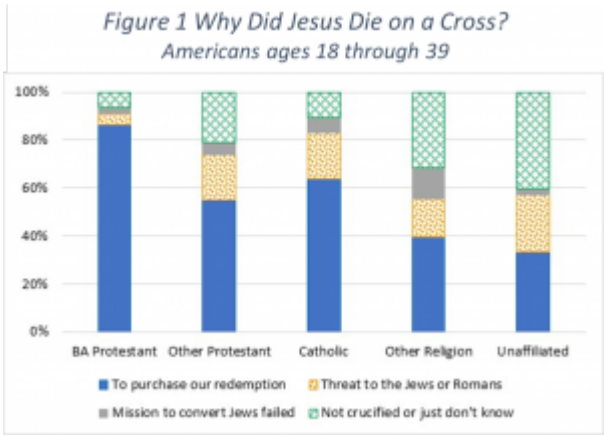
We will look at these two areas alone and then see how those with a biblical worldview align with these questions.

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

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

1. Why did Jesus die on a cross?

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



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

A fair number of Other Protestants and Catholics (about 20% of each group) said that either the Jewish leaders or the Romans caused Jesus' death on the cross. But any Christian should

realize that Jesus had to choose crucifixion. Prior attempts by authoritative groups demonstrated that they could not lay a hand on him otherwise.

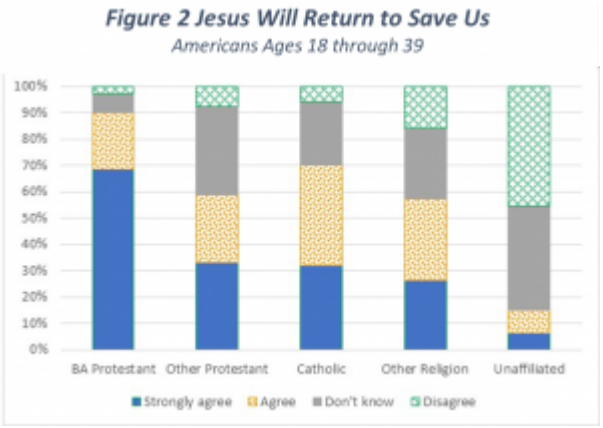
Interestingly, about 40% of Other Religions and 30% of the Unaffiliated say Jesus died to redeem us. They understand this is what Christians say about Jesus' crucifixion. It is the best answer for them because it doesn't say that Jesus' death actually worked to redeem us, only that He did
it to redeem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

The second question is:

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

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

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



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

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

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

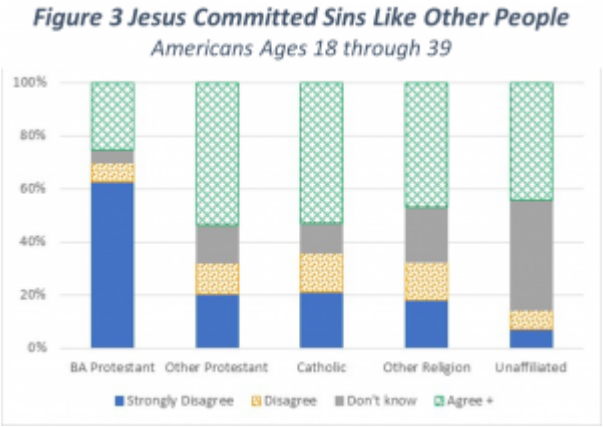
The third question (also used for determining a Basic Biblical Worldview) is:

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

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

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

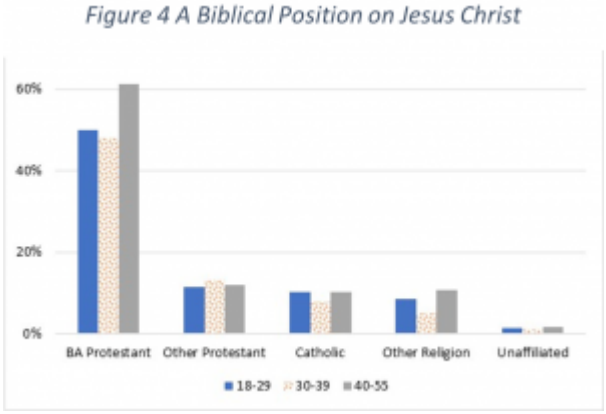
sins of the world.



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

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

Accepting a Doctrinally Consistent Set of Beliefs



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

As you can see, all other religious groups drop to around one in ten or less with a good understanding of Jesus. The

Unaffiliated drop to a level that is basically zero. In toto, about one out of six Americans age 55 and under have an understanding of who Jesus really is in these three fundamental areas.

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

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

Topic 2: Are there multiple ways to heaven?

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

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

angels."

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

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

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

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

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

Who Believes in Multiple Ways to God

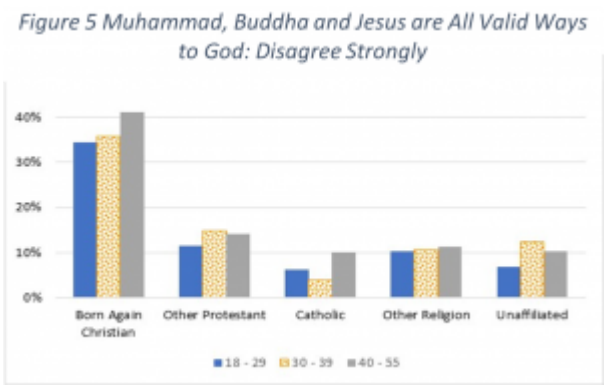


Figure 5 Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus are All Valid Ways to God: Disagree Strongly

First let's look at just question number one across the various religious groups, looking for the answer **Disagree strongly** as shown in Figure 5{3}. If someone disagrees with this statement, they could be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist, etc. The first thing you may notice is that all religious groups other than Born Again Christian all

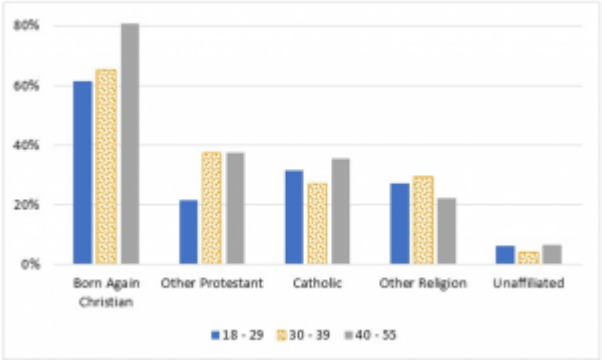
congregate around 5% to 15%. So, for all these groups, around one in ten people take a strong non-pluralistic view. Or turning it around, about 9 out of 10 of them are pluralists.

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

Who Believes Jesus is the Only Way

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

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

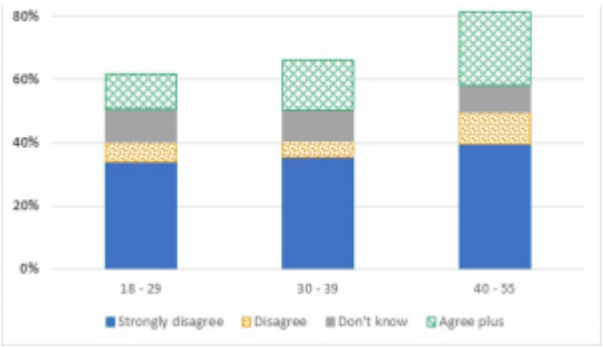
Comparing this chart with the prior one, we see that Born Again Christians are at least 25 percentage points higher for this second question. And, the other Christian religious groups are higher by about 25 percentage points as well. And

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.

An Inconsistent Worldview Among Many Born Again Christians

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

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



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

In Figure 7, we look at what the Born Again Christians who stated that Jesus is the only way to a true relationship with God said when responding to the question about Mohammad, Buddha and Jesus. First note that the total height of each column is the same as the Born Again Christian columns in Figure 6. As shown, almost half of each column represents those who did not strongly disagree with the pluralistic view. For the youngest adults, that upper portion is about evenly

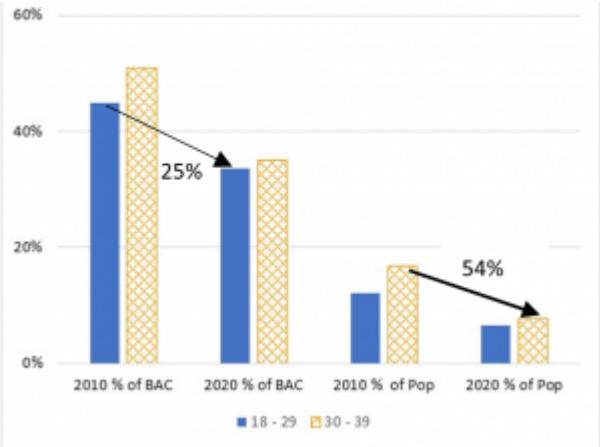
split between those who Don't Know and those who Agree or Strongly Agree that the three men taught valid ways to God. For those ages 40 through 55, we see that a significantly higher percentage affirm that all three men taught valid ways to God.

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

Changes over the Last Decade

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

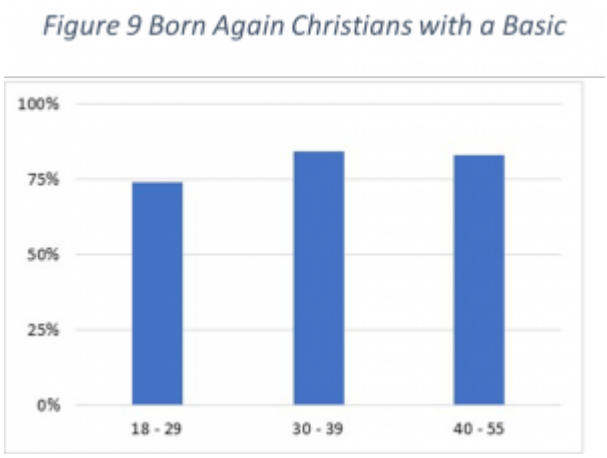
Figure 8 Born Again Christians Who Are Not Pluralists comparing 2010 with 2020



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

Over the last decade, Born Again Christians in America have

continued to grow in the number who are pluralists.



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

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

Countering the Negative Slide

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

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

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

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

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

• Explain that the cost was so high, no other way to God is possible for sinful man. No one can come to the Father except through the Son and anyone may come through Him. “God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God’s purpose at his appointed time.” 1 Timothy 2:4-6

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

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

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

Notes

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

Measuring Pluralism: A Difficult Task

Steve Cable examines the data concerning American Christians' beliefs about pluralism, the belief that all religions are true and valid ways to know about God, the world, and salvation.

We are in the process of examining two related Pew Research surveys taken by about 35,000 people, once in 2007[{1} and again in 2014{2}. In today's post we want to consider the question of religious pluralism among American Christians. As there are different views concerning the meaning of "religious pluralism," for this post we will use this definition: *Pluralism is basically the belief that the various world religions are true and equally valid in their communication of*

the truth about God, the world, and salvation. I.e., there are multiple religious beliefs and practices which will suffice to get one to heaven. It does not mean that all religions are sufficient, but that more than one distinctly different religious concept will result in eternal salvation.

In their 2007 survey, Pew had one question dealing with pluralism:

> Which of these two statements comes closer to your own views even if neither is exactly right?

1. My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life. [OR]
2. Many religions can lead to eternal life

The responses to this question for Evangelical Christians and for Non-Evangelical Christians{3} are given in the table below.

Table 1 – Percent of Respondents Who Said "My Religion is the One, True Faith"

Age Range	18 – 27	30 plus
Evangelical	44.6%	36.4%
Non-Evangelical Christian	19.0%	14.2%

Not surprisingly, the percentage of Evangelicals who selected statement #1 far exceed the percentage of Non-Evangelical Christians.

However, it is disappointing that significantly fewer than one half of Evangelicals would select that statement. And it is surprising that the younger cohort is much more likely than the older cohort to make such a statement.

Which brings up the question: When someone says "my religion is the one," are they referring to Christianity vs. other major religions, OR are they referring to their denomination vs. other Christian denominations? One would guess that many

Christians, especially from older generations, may be thinking about the latter.

In fact, the Pew Research organization realized this issue almost immediately after releasing the results of the 2007 survey. They did another smaller survey in 2008{4} to get insight into this question and reported:

One of the most frequently asked questions to arise from the 2007 Landscape Survey findings is how the 70% of religiously affiliated respondents who said "many religions can lead to eternal life" interpreted the phrase "many religions." For example, do Christians who express this view have in mind only Christians from denominations other than their own, or are they thinking more broadly of non-Christian religions? To shed light on this issue, the new survey asks those who believe that many religions can lead to eternal life a series of follow-up questions . . . nearly three-quarters (72%) of evangelicals who say many religions can lead to salvation name at least one non-Christian faith that can do so.{5}

Turning this around, they found that 28% of evangelicals who said that many religions can lead to eternal life were only talking about other Christian religions. Thus, this group of evangelicals would not be considered pluralistic. So, I analyzed the data from this 2008 survey and used those results to calculate data of Christians' views on pluralism as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Results from 2008 Religion and Public Life Survey

Age Range		18 – 27	30 plus
Evangelical	One True Faith	64%	49%
	Only Christians in Heaven{6}	74%	61%
Non-Evangelical Christian	One True Faith	24%	16%
	Only Christians in Heaven	37%	22%

So we can see that adding these people who were pluralistic only among different Christian faiths, we add another ten percent or so to those Christians who are not pluralistic. However, this 2008 data introduces another issue. Those who said their religion was the one, true faith appears to have increased by almost 20 percentage points for Evangelicals under 28 (from 45% to 64%). I don't believe this is possible given the lack of events in 2008 to account for such a significant, sudden change. However, the Pew report comments on it this way, ". . . the number of people saying theirs is the one, true faith that can lead to eternal life increased slightly between 2007 and 2008, from 24% to 29%. The increase is especially pronounced for white evangelical Protestants, among whom the figure rose from 37% to 49%."{7}

In the 2014 Religious Landscape survey, the ambiguity was resolved by asking two questions:

1. The question asked in the 2007 survey listed above, and
2. **ASK IF CHRISTIAN AND SAY "MANY RELIGIONS"** to prior question: And do you think it's only Christian religions that can lead to eternal life, or can some non-Christian religions also lead to eternal life?

    a) Only Christian religions can lead to eternal life
    b) Some non-Christian religions can lead to eternal life

We can then compare the results from both Religious Landscape surveys as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3 – Comparing 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Results with Estimates for Shaded Areas

	Evangelical		Non-Evangelical Christian	
Year Surveyed	2007	2014	2007	2014

Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus	
My religion is one, true faith	45%	36%	52%	42%	39%	19%	14%	23%	19%	15%
Only Christians in heaven	55%{8}	50%	60%	54%	59%	32%	20%	27%	27%	25%

Note: the numbers for 2007 Only Christians in heaven are estimates and could be off significantly.

And the results from the 2008 Religion and Public Life with the 2014 Religious Landscape survey as shown in table 4:

Table 4 – Comparing 2008 Religion and Public Life Survey with 2014 Religious Landscape Survey

	Evangelical					Non-Evangelical Christian				
Year Surveyed	2008		2014			2008		2014		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
My religion is one, true faith	64%	49%	52%	42%	39%	24%	16%	23%	19%	15%
Only Christians in heaven	74%	61%	60%	54%	59%	37%	22%	27%	27%	25%

I think the important things to note from the two tables are:

1) Adding those who said “Many religions can lead to eternal life but non-Christian religions cannot” to those who said “My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.” we see an increase of between 8 and 20 percentage points;

2) The increased percentages in 2014 also even out the results from across age groups. For example, for Evangelicals you can see a swing of 13 percentage points from the 18 to 24 age group compared to the 35 plus age group on the "one, true faith" response. But, when you look at "only Christians in heaven," you see the swing across age groups has dropped to 1 percentage point. Apparently, the youngest adults are less likely to be thinking only of their denomination when they answered the first question with "My religion . . ."

3) Finally, there is a slight drop off in Evangelicals who are not pluralists between 2007 and 2014.

As this somewhat tortuous journey through the subject of pluralism exploring three different surveys clearly shows, it is hard to nail down what people are thinking when asked about pluralism. The primary takeaway is that slightly less than one out of two Evangelicals (~40%) have a pluralistic view, while three out of four Non-evangelical Christians have such a view. An Evangelical with a pluralistic viewpoint has no reason to be concerned with evangelism and technically is not an Evangelical. In a subsequent post, we will examine the difference in worldview beliefs between non-pluralist Evangelicals and pluralist Evangelicals

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. Consists of Mainline Protestant Denominations, Catholics, and some Historically Black Denominations.

4. **Pew Research, Religion and Public Life Survey 2008**, 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.

5. Pew Research, **Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life**, December 18, 2008

6. This factor was determined by looking at the people who answered the first question: "Many religions can lead to eternal life" but in answering subsequent questions said Islam, Hinduism, Atheism and No Religious Faith cannot achieve eternal life. When they answered the first question with "many religions", they obviously were referring to many Christian religions (or possibly Christian and Jewish religions). I did not include the subsequent question about the "Jewish religion" because the Bible is clear that many OT Jews will be in heaven.

7. Perhaps the candidacy of Barack Obama triggered this decrease in pluralism for white evangelical Protestants. If it did, its effect had dissipated by the 2014 survey with results much closer to the 2007 survey than the 2008 survey. I think it was probably the result of surveying cell phone users as well as landlines in 2008.

8. This number is estimated by taking the number for One, True Faith and adding the percentage of those Christians in the 2008 survey who said that many religions could lead to eternal life but not Islam, Hinduism, atheism, and No Religious Faith.

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Western European Religious Makeup

This is the fifth of a series of posts reporting on our analysis of the survey data collected by the World Values Survey project. Surveys were conducted in 57 countries between 2010 and 2014. In all, over 85,000 people were interviewed for these surveys. The survey had fifteen questions directly concerning religious beliefs and practices. But it also had questions in a number of areas that related to how people applied their religious beliefs to cultural and political issues.

The first four blogs dealt with the North American countries, the United States and Mexico. With this post, I begin a series on the beliefs across the five European countries included in the survey process: Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Cyprus.

As you probably know, Germany and Sweden were at the heart of the Protestant revolution, with the Netherlands following in their footsteps. Spain and Cyprus retained a much stronger connection to Roman Catholicism. Let’s see how their self-declared religious affiliations line up today.

Table 1 | Religious Denomination

Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)	None (%)	Other (%)
Germany	All	29	33	31	6
	Under 30	29	34	30	7
	60 plus	33	38	28	1

Sweden	All	2	61	34	3
	Under 30	1	49	43	7
	60 plus	2	69	29	0
Netherlands	All	18	16	64	3
	Under 30	11	10	75	4
	60 plus	25	21	54	1
Spain	All	73	2	24	1
	Under 30	63	2	33	2
	60 plus	86	1	13	0
Cyprus	All	68	1	7	25
	Under 30	53	1	9	36
	60 plus	90	0	4	5

As shown the countries vary widely in their self-professed religious makeup. All of them, except Cyprus, have a significant percentage of Nones ranging from 24% in Spain to 64% in the Netherlands. Sweden, Netherlands and Spain have a significant increase in Nones among those under the age of 30 as we also observed in the United States and Mexico.

Apart from the Nones, each nation is somewhat unique in its distribution. Germany is almost equally split between Catholics, Protestants and Nones. Sweden has Protestants as a strong majority at the level of Protestants plus Catholics in Germany. The Netherlands has a strong majority of Nones with the remainder evenly split between Catholics and Protestants. Spain, of course, has a strong majority of Catholics and almost no Protestants. Cyprus also shows a strong majority of Catholics with a strong minority of Muslims among the younger generations.

As we will see in the following blogs, many of those who selected Protestant or Catholic denominations are not involved

with the church in any significant way.

Pluralism

In the first blog of this series on the religious preferences of the United States and Mexico, we looked at how many agreed with this statement, “The only acceptable religion is my religion.” Let’s look at how this question was answered in Western Europe.

Table 2 | Agree or Strongly Agree: The Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion

Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Germany	All	33	30
	Under 30	22	23
	60 plus	49	30
Sweden	All	16	8
	Under 30	0	4
	60 plus	30	12
Netherlands	All	10	25
	Under 30	19	36
	Under 60 plus	12	23
Spain	All	28	32
	Under 30	26	39
	60 plus	35	25
Cyprus	All	54	71
	Under 30	40	67
	60 plus	69	100

Note: Shaded areas did not have enough respondents to make the data useful

As shown, in Germany only about one in three Catholics and Protestants would say their religion is right and others are

wrong. Those under thirty are much less likely to make that assertion. In any case, the vast majority of Germans take a pluralistic view.

Swedes are much less likely that Germans to agree with this statement, with fewer than one in ten taking a non-pluralistic position. Protestants in the Netherlands are similar to Germans, but Catholics are significantly more pluralistic. Catholics in Spain are also similar to those in Germany.

Except for Cyprus, all the countries had the vast majority of those affiliated with a Christian church taking a pluralistic view.

It is interesting to note that on this question Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands combined were generally consistent with the United States. Mexico and Spain were also fairly consistent, with 49% of Mexicans and 32% of Spaniards taking a non-pluralistic view.

Clearly for Western Europeans, whether they claim to be Catholic or Protestant, most reject the teachings of the Bible in favor of a pluralistic doctrine. They change John 14:4 from "I am **the** way, the truth and the life" to "I am **a** way, **a** truth and **a** life."

Biblical Worldview Beliefs from PALS Survey of 2012: No Rebound Seen

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In my previous blog post, we looked at the *Faith Matters*

survey taken in 2011 to see if the trend was continuing toward fewer people holding a biblical worldview. In this post, we ask a similar question looking at the *Portraits in American Life Survey* (PALS) taken in 2012{1}. The PALS is an extensive, national-level panel study focused on religion in the U.S., with a particular focus on capturing ethnic and racial diversity. In this survey of over 1400 people across America, a set of questions was asked which
are very similar to the biblical worldview questions asked in the Probe and Barna surveys.

The questions used to establish a basic biblical worldview are as follows:

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

Let's begin by looking at how many have a biblical worldview; i.e., agreeing with all the statements above. The results look like this (where Evan/BP stands for Evangelical or Historically Black Protestant):

Biblical Worldview					
Evan/BP		Not Evan/BP		All	
20-29	30+	20-29	30+	20-29	30+
32.5%	46.2%	5.4%	11.4%	14.7%	22.9%

Note that the youngest respondents in this survey are 20 years old rather than 18 as in the other surveys. As you can see,

about one in three evangelical or black Protestant believers under the age of 30 profess to holding a biblical worldview and only about one in 20 of those who do not affiliate with an evangelical or black Protestant denomination. These results are very similar to those reported in my book,