

There Arose Another Generation After Them Who Did Not Know The Lord, Nor Yet The Work Which He Had Done

Introduction

Way back in March 2016, I presented some research I found in a book entitled “Cultural Captives”. The book was written in 2012 by Stephen Cable, the Senior Vice President of Probe Ministries. Probe is an apologetics and worldview ministry based in Plano that began in 1973. The book focused on several surveys of young adults in America and provided a fairly comprehensive summary of what these surveys revealed about the state of Christianity among these young adults. The lesson focused on what they believed about basic doctrine, what their religious practices were, and what they believed about sexual issues, abortion, homosexuality and science. In 2020, Probe Ministries did a new survey, and I thought it would informative if we covered some of the things the new survey indicates may be going on in the church today.

The Earlier Data

First, let’s talk about the earlier data. There were several surveys that Probe used to produce the 2010 data and the conclusions that we covered in my earlier lesson. One of these surveys was a study done by the Barna research group for Probe. I’ll refer to that survey as the 2010 Survey. Probe completed another survey in 2020 that’s I’ll refer to as the 2020 Survey.

Here’s what the 2010 Survey covered:

1. Probe Ministries 2010 Survey

- a. 813 adults (18-40) who professed to be “born again”.*
- b. Nationwide.*
- c. Looked at religious beliefs and practices.*

Here’s what the 2020 Survey covered:

1. Probe Ministries 2020 Survey

- a. 717 adults (18-55) who professed to be “born again”.*
- b. Nationwide.*
- c. Looked at religious beliefs and practices.*

Tonight, we are look at what the survey data may reveal about people who Probe referred to as “born again” – people who are most likely to be believers. We will talk about how Probe identified people who they considered “born again” in a minute. In the 2010 Survey, there were 813 adults ages 18-40 who Probe considered to be “born again”, and in 2020, there were 717 adults ages 18-55 who were considered to be “born again”. (The 2020 survey increased the age range to age 55 in an effort to track changes that might have occurred in the 2010 age group as it got older.) We are going to look at what the 2020 Survey reveals about the beliefs of these people in three areas – Worldview, Jesus Christ, and Moral Decision-making. Just to be clear, Probe did not survey the

same people in 2020 as they did in 2010 – they did not try to track the way a particular individual’s thought may have changed. We are just talking about age groups.

As I said above, in this lesson I wanted to focus on the people surveyed who would most likely be believers. So we need to look at the data as it pertains to people Probe categorized as “born again”. To be categorized as “born again”, a person had to answer both these two questions in the following ways:

Who Probe Considered To Be Born Again:

1. Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?

Answer: Yes

2. What best describes your belief about what will happen to you after you die:

Answer: I will go to heaven because I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

Now, I realize that if you interpret these questions as a description of the gospel there is a problem because a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life is not a requirement for justification salvation – it’s an issue of sanctification. And confession of sins is not required. Numerous passages make it abundantly clear that all that is required for justification salvation is belief in Jesus Christ. So, from a gospel presentation perspective, it is unfortunate that Probe constructed these questions in the way they did. However, Probe was using these questions to identify who most likely would be believers out of all the 3106 people they surveyed. I would expect that question No. 2 would identify people who are believers – those people who have believed in Christ. And I would expect that question No. 1 would identify people who may be somewhat inclined to think of themselves as followers of Christ. A person who truthfully answered both questions these ways would most likely be a believer who has some inclination to follow Christ.

I also need to point out that we are going to limit our analysis tonight to protestants who Probe considered “born again” – our analysis will exclude Catholics who Probe categorized as “born again” based on their responses to the two “born again” questions. We are limiting our analysis to Born Again Protestants because there should be more theological agreement and consistency if the ways of thinking that come from Catholic theology and doctrine are excluded. So – for the rest of the evening, we are looking at the data as it pertains to Born Again Protestants.

I don’t think it is correct to assume that all of the people Probe categorized as Born Again Protestants are believers – there are probably some in the group who aren’t – though it is interesting that an unbeliever would answer the two questions the way a believer would. My assumption is that most of them are believers. If that is the case, you would expect most of this group of Born Again Protestants to have beliefs consistent with the Bible. As we will see, that isn’t the case.

Let’s look at some of the results from the survey.

Proportion of Believers in the United States

Between 2010 and 2020 how has the proportion of believers between the ages of 18-40 changed in relation to the American population? According to Probe, this proportion has remained relatively stable with maybe a slight decline over the past decade. There has been a steady decline in the 18-30 age group, with the over 30 age group holding steady. This may indicate that some in the younger age group are becoming believers when they get into their 30's.

According to the Probe 2020 data, around 20% of the American population may be Born Again Protestants. Other surveys indicate a potentially higher number, if "born again" Catholics are included, but the definitions used in these surveys to determine whether a person is "born again" were broader and the estimates may be overstated. These surveys indicate the percentage could be closer to 25% to 30%. But whether the number is 20% or 30%, it looks like this proportion has been somewhat stable over the past decade. It is not good that this number isn't increasing, and it is worse news that the proportion of Born Again Protestants in the 18-30 age group is showing a steady decline.

Let's put these percentages to the population numbers. In 2020, the number of people in the United States over the age of 18 was about 258.3 million. If 20% of these people are believers, then about 52.6 million people in the United States may be believers.

But consider this – the number of people who are Atheist, Agnostic or Nothing In Particular increased from about 20% of the population to over 45%. So there is about 116 million of them. And the number of people who hold to Other Religions – such as Islam and Mormonism – increased over the past decade from about 7% of the population to 10%. That's about 25.8 million of them. Both groups are growing.

Our county is essentially a large mission field, with approximately 55% of the people either being Atheist, Agnostic, Nothing In Particular or Other Religions. Can God use 20% of the population to influence our culture? – of course He can – Jesus was 1, the apostles were 12 – the church grew from them. But that 20% need to be faithful servants. And this gets us to some of the questions Probe used to evaluate the beliefs of the Born Again Protestants.

How Many Born Again Protestants Hold To A Christian Worldview?

The Probe surveys attempted to identify the extent Born Again Protestants held to a "Christian biblical worldview". Probe divided this into two parts – beliefs they considered consistent with what they called a Basic Christian worldview and additional beliefs that they considered to be an Expanded Christian worldview.

A person who answered these four questions in the following ways was considered to have a Basic biblical worldview:

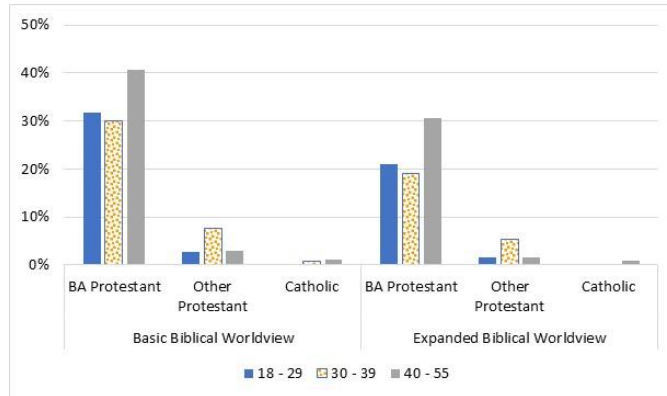
Basic Biblical Worldview

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

4. *When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ committed sins like other people: **Disagree Strongly***

These questions are pretty basic and you would expect a very high percentage of Born Again Protestants to have answered them correctly. Here's the results of the survey – look at the data on the left side:

Figure 1 Worldview Beliefs of 2020 Christians



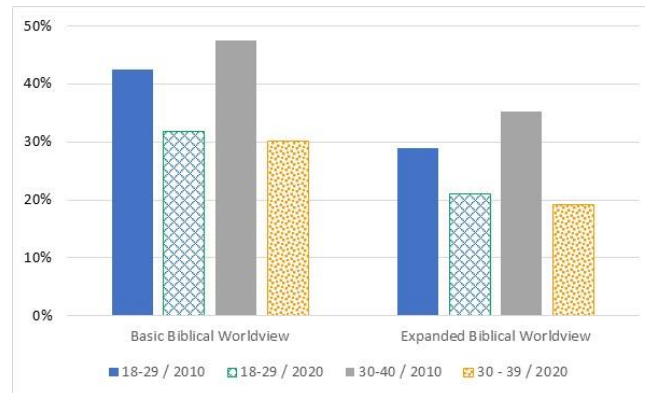
This left side of this chart shows the percentage of Born Again Protestants who answered all 4 of the Basic Biblical worldview questions correctly. These were broken out into 3 age groups – 18-29, 30-39 and 40-55. Ignore the columns concerning the “Other Protestants” and Catholics – but notice how dismal they are.

This is stunning:

- Only 32% of Born Again Protestants under the age of 30 answered all 4 of these questions correctly.
- Only 30% of those between 30-40 answered all 4 correctly.
- Only 40% of those between 40-55 answered all 4 correctly.

How has this changed since 2010? We can only compare the 18-29 and the 30-39 age groups – Probe didn't have the data for the older age group in 2010:

Figure 2 Born Again Protestant Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
% of all Born Again Protestants



In 2010, about 42% of Born Again Protestants under 30 answered all 4 questions correctly, and about 48% of Born Again Protestants between 30-40 answered all 4 correctly.

This indicates that the proportion of Born Again Protestants who hold to a Basic Biblical worldview has declined by about 10 percentage points over the 18-29 age group and about 18 percentage points in the 30-39 age group.

We need to let this sink in - **ONLY 30% TO 40% OF BORN AGAIN PROTESTANTS – MOST OF WHOM YOU WOULD EXPECT TO BE BELIEVERS - ANSWERED ALL 4 OF THESE BASIC QUESTIONS CORRECTLY.** Here’s another stunner – only 84% of them believed that God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today. In other words, 16% of people in the group believe something else about God. Maybe this 16% is indicative of the proportion of unbelievers in the group – I sure hope it is. Otherwise, there are some really messed up believers out there.

Let’s look at the number of people who seem to have what Probe called an Expanded Worldview. To identify people with an Expanded Worldview, Probe added two additional questions:

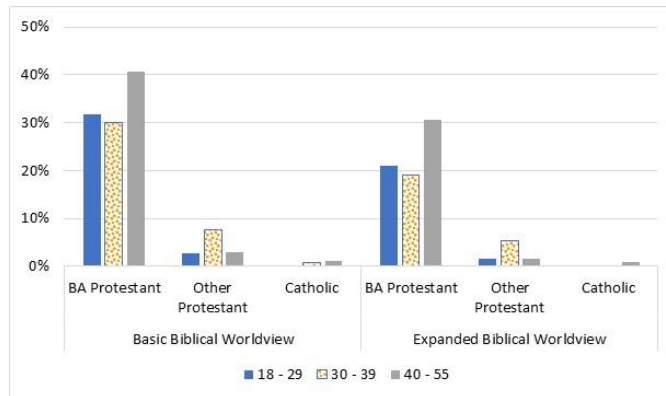
Additional Beliefs for an Expanded Biblical Worldview

1. The devil or Satan is not a real being, but is a symbol of evil: **Disagree Strongly**
2. Some people believe there are moral truths (such as murder is always wrong) that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Others believe that moral truth always depends upon circumstances. Do you believe there are moral truths that are unchanging, or does moral truth always depend upon circumstances: **There are moral truths that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time.**

Once again, these questions should be no-brainers for a believer. Let’s look back at the charts to see how many Born Again Protestants got all 6 of the questions right.

Here are the results of the 2020 Survey – look at the columns on the right side:

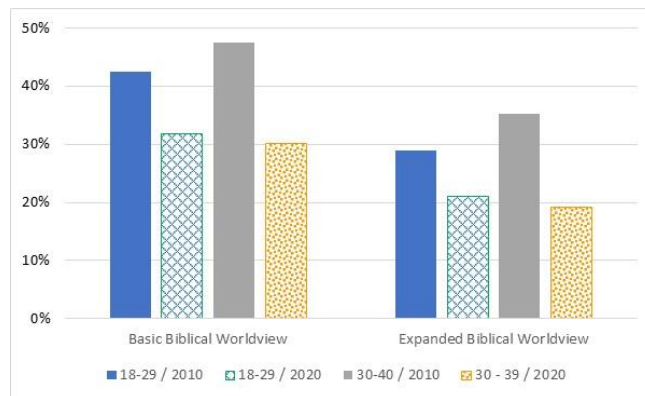
Figure 3 Worldview Beliefs of 2020 Christians



Only about 22% of Born Again Protestants under the age of 30 answered all 6 of the worldview questions correctly. Only 19% of those between 30-40 answered all 6 correctly. And only 30% of those between 40-55 answered all 6 correctly – ignore Other Protestants and Catholics but note that these groups are abysmal.

How does this compare to the same age groups in the 2010 Survey? Look back at this chart – look at the right side:

Figure 4 Born Again Protestant Worldview Beliefs Across 10 Years
% of all Born Again Protestants



In 2010, about 29% of Born Again Protestants between 18-29 got all 6 questions right. 35% of those between 30-40 got them right.

So – the percentage of Born Again Protestants who got all 6 questions right has dropped 7 percentage points in the 18-29 age group, and has dropped 16 percentage points in the 30-40 age group. That’s not a good trend.

Another interesting thing – Only 40% of Born Again Protestants answered at least 5 of the questions correctly. About 55% of them got at least 4 right. About 82% got at least 2 right. Which means 18% of them couldn’t get 2 of those questions right. Once again – maybe this is reflective of the proportion of unbelievers in the group.

So – to summarize – the Probe data shows:

- Out of Born Again Protestants – people who say they have accepted Christ as their savior and who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life - people who we should expect to understand very basic Biblical doctrine –only about 30% - 40% believe all of these things:
 - God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world todayⁱⁱ
 - The Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings
 - If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they CANNOT earn a place in heaven.
 - When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ DID NOT commit sins like other people.
- And only about 20% - 30% believe the above and believe:
 - The devil or Satan is a real being.
 - There are moral truths that are true for everyone, everywhere and for all time.

Not even one-third of Born Again Protestants get all these basic things right. And the data shows that these numbers are declining. This is terrifying.

Is Jesus the Only Way?

Now – lets look at what the surveys show about what Born Again Protestants think about Jesus. In **John 14:6** Jesus said **“I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.”** How many Born Again Protestants believe Him?

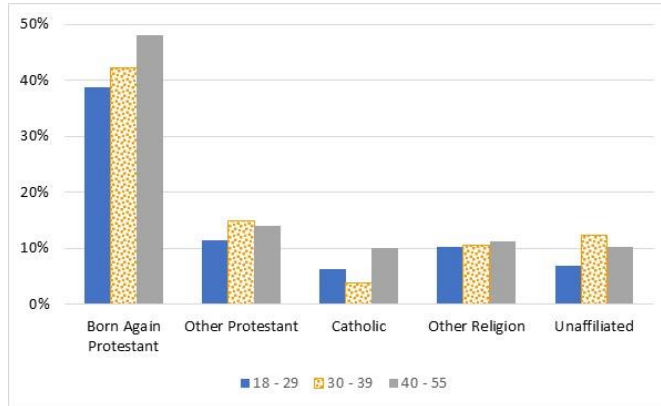
Here are two questions the Probe survey used to find out:

1. Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God. (Answers range from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly)
2. I believe that the only path to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ. (Answers range from Disagree Strongly to Agree Strongly)

You would expect a believer to Strongly Disagree with the first question and Agree Strongly with the second. A person who believes that Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God would be considered a pluralist – that Jesus is not the only way to God – that there are many ways to God.

Here’s the survey results for Question No. 1 – How did the Born Again Protestants respond to the declaration that “Muhammad, Buddha and Jesus all taught valid ways to God”:

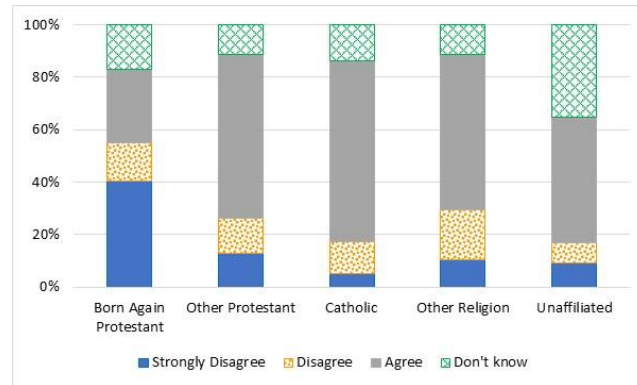
Figure 5 Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Taught Valid Ways to God: Disagree Strongly



- 39% in the 18-29 age group Strongly Disagreed
- 42% in the 30 – 39 age group Strongly Disagreed
- 48% in the 40 – 50 age group Strongly Disagreed

Take a look at this – this depicts the range of answers of the Born Again Protestants under 40 – look at the far left column:

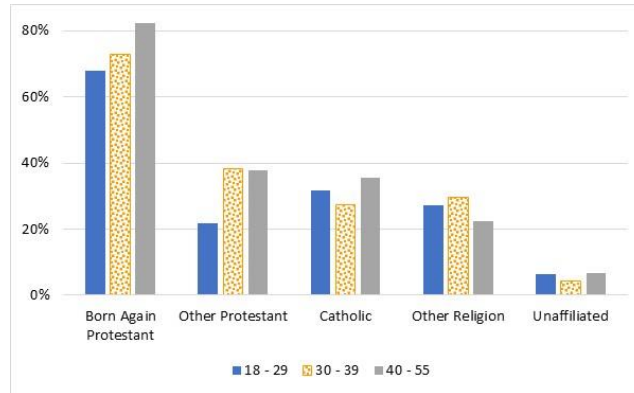
Figure 6 Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Taught Valid Ways to God – Respondents Ages 18 thru 39



- Only about 57% disagreed with the statement.
- Which means 43% either agreed or didn't know.
- Another stunner – it looks like 25% - one quarter – of Born Again Protestants are pluralists – they agree that Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Taught Valid Ways to God.

Now - How did the Born Again Protestants respond to the second statement – “I believe that the only path to a true relationship with God is through Jesus Christ”? Here's the results – look at the far left column:

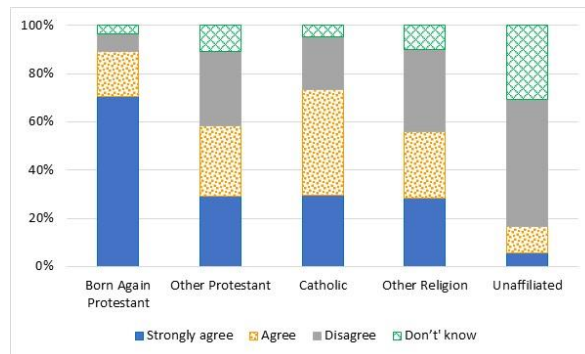
Figure 7 Jesus is the Only Path to a True Relationship with God:
Agree Strongly



- 65% in the 18-29 age group Agreed Strongly
- 70% in the 30 – 39 age group Agreed Strongly
- 82% in the 40-50 age group Agreed Strongly

Here’s the range of answers of the Born Again Protestants under 40:

Figure 8 Jesus is the Only Path to God
Respondents Ages 18 through 39



- 90%
path to a true relationship with God.
- 10% disagreed or didn’t know.

agreed that Jesus is the only

This is odd when you consider how the first question was answered. You would expect people to answer Question 2 in pretty much the same way they answered Question 1. Question 2 is basically the same question asked in a different way. But significantly more Born Again Protestants agreed with Question 2 than disagreed with Question 1. In the first question about 43% did not disagree that Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Taught Valid Ways to God. But in the second question almost 90% agreed that Jesus is the Only Path to a True Relationship with God. Apparently, many of the people who thought Muhammad, Buddha, and Jesus All Taught Valid Ways to God also thought Jesus is the Only Path to a True Relationship with God. There are some really confused believers out there.

Probe looked at this a little deeper and concluded:

“... about 4 out of 10 (40%) of Born Again Protestants appear to have a consistent biblical view toward pluralism About 3 out of 10 (30%) appear to be totally in line with the pluralist position for the younger ages The last 30% 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.”

How does these results compare to the 2010 Survey? The number of Born Again Protestants who are definitely not pluralistic has decreased by about 20% over the past decade. More and more Born Again Protestants either agree with pluralistic ideas or don't know what to believe.

Bottom line – many Born Again Protestants are at best confused about whether or not Jesus is the only way to God. And this trend is getting worse.

This idea has definitely has affected the spread of the gospel. The 2020 Probe survey asked this question:

“When I refrain from communicating my religious belief with someone, it's usually because:”ⁱⁱⁱ

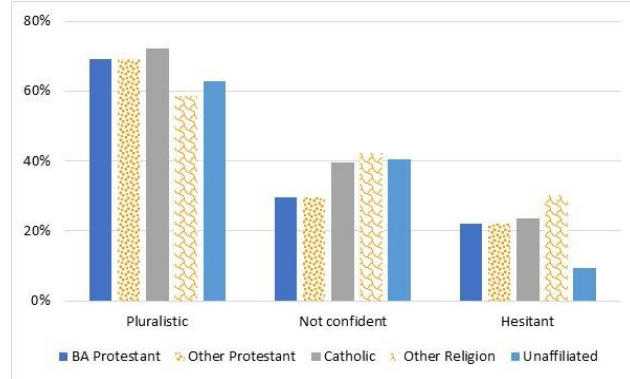
1. *They can get to heaven through their different religious belief. [Pluralism]*
2. *We shouldn't impose our ideas on others. [Pluralism]*
3. *The Bible tells us not to judge others. [Pluralism]*
4. *It just doesn't seem to be that important and I don't want to risk alienating them. [Not confident]*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

Notice that they grouped these responses into three sets:

- **Pluralism** – there are other ways to get to heaven 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)

Here are the results:

Figure 9 Reason for Refraining from Witnessing
Americans 18 through 39



The dark blue column in each group represents the answers of the Born Again Protestants. Apparently the biggest reason Born Again Protestants refrain from presenting the gospel is their pluralistic mindset. 70% of them don't witness for reasons related to pluralism.

What Else Do Born Again Protestants Think About Jesus?

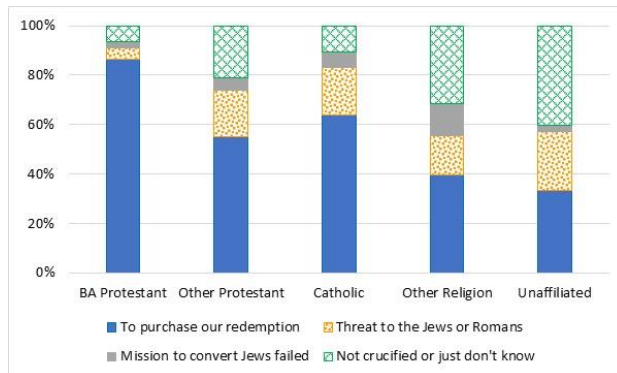
The Probe surveys asked this question:

1. Why did Jesus die on a cross? – Possible Responses:

- a. He threatened the Roman authority's 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

Here's how the Born Again Protestants responded:

Figure 10 Why Did Jesus Die on a Cross?
Americans ages 18 through 39



- Good news? – over 85% of Born Again Protestants answered “to purchase our redemption”

- Bad news – 15% didn't. Once again – this may be indicative of the number of unbelievers in the group.

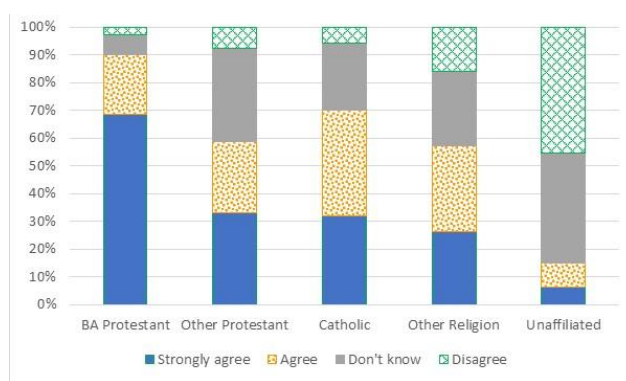
Here's another question:

1. Jesus will return to this earth to save those who await his coming.

a. Answers ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Here's how Born Again Protestants responded:

Figure 11 Jesus Will Return to Save Us
Americans Ages 18 through 39



- 90% of Born Again Protestants agree; but it is interesting that less than 70% Strongly Agree.
- 10% don't know or disagree.

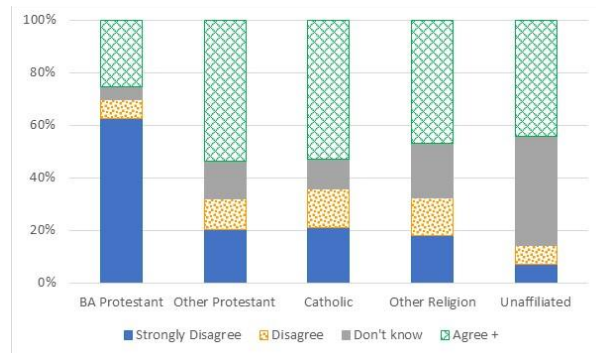
Here's another question – this was one that was included in the Basic Worldview set of questions:

1. When he lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people.

a. Answers ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly

Here are the responses:

Figure 12 Jesus Committed Sins Like Other People
Americans Ages 18 through 39

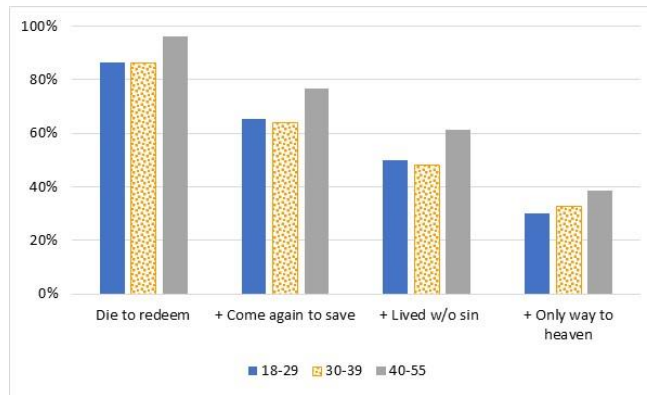


- About 66% of Born Again Protestants disagree or strongly disagree.

- 33% either don't know or agree. Most of these – approx. 25% actually agree that Jesus committed sins.

Now lets take a look at how many Born Again Protestants hold to a Biblical view of all of these questions about Jesus. Look at this chart:

Figure 13 Cumulative Graph of Beliefs about Jesus For Born Again Protestants



Let's look at just the blue and orange columns – the Born Again Protestants under 40 years old. It makes it easier to compare the numbers – but you see the same trend in the over 40's.

- 85% believe Jesus died to redeem sinners.
- 65% believe that Jesus died to redeem sinners AND He is coming again to save us.
- 50% believe the first two statements AND that Jesus lived without sin.
- 33% believe all four things about Jesus – that He died to redeem sinners AND He is coming again to save us AND that He lived without sin AND that He is the only way to heaven.

Amazing – only 33% of the Born Again Protestants believe all of these basic things about Christ.

How Do The Born Again Protestants Make Moral Decisions?

You would expect most of the Born Again Protestants would look to the Bible for direction in moral decision making. Let's explore that:

The 2020 Probe survey asked the following question:

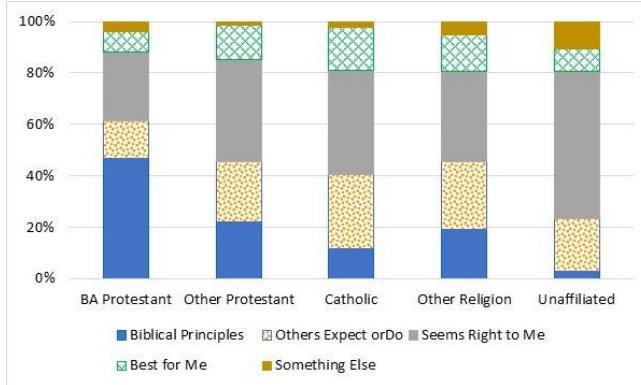
When you are faced with a personal moral choice, which one of the following statements best describes how you will most likely decide what to do?

1. *Do what makes the most people happy.*
2. *Do what your family or friends would expect you to do.*
3. *Do what biblical principles teach.*
4. *Do what you believe most believe would do under similar circumstances.*
5. *Do what seems right to me at the time.*
6. *Do what will produce the best outcome for yourself.*

7. Other.

Here's the results:

Figure 14 Where do We Look for Personal Moral Guidance?
Americans Ages 18-39



- Only about 47% of Born Again Protestants say they do what the Bible teaches.
- 53% use another source for moral decision-making.
- About 30% say they do what seems right to them (Have we heard that before? “everyone did what was right in his own eyes”?)

Those numbers are bad - but it is worse than that. There were some questions in the Probe survey about sexual morality. You can use these sexual morality questions as indicative of whether a person who says they use the Bible for moral decision-making actually uses the Bible for moral decision-making. These questions require application of Biblical doctrine to moral issues of sexual morality. So - of the 47% of Born Again Protestants who said they use the Bible for moral guidance, how did they respond the questions about sexual morality? Did they respond based on what the Bible clearly teaches?

Probe asked two questions on which the Bible provides clear moral guidance. Here they are:

1. ***Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake:*** (Answers range from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly)
2. ***Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:***
 - a. *Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.*
 - b. *Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.*
 - c. *Will have a negative effect on the relationship.*
 - d. *Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.*

The Bible clearly states that fornication (sex between people who are not married to each other) is wrong. Thus, people who say they use the Bible to make moral decisions should Agree Strongly that *sex among unmarried people is always a mistake*. Living with someone in a sexual relationship is also fornication. People who say they use the Bible to make moral decisions should select answer d. for that question. Probe defined someone who answered these two questions Biblically as a “**Supporter of Sexual Purity**”.

Here's the result:

- 47% of Born Again Protestants said they use Biblical Principles to make moral decisions.
- But less than half (45%) of these Born Again Protestants who said they use Biblical Principles to make moral decisions are also Supporters of Sexual Purity. (You would expect this to be 100%.)
- So, less than half of Born Again Protestants who SAY they use Biblical Principles to make moral decisions, actually use the Bible to make moral decisions about Sexual Purity.

The others either don't know what the Bible teaches about sex – in which case they don't know the Bible well enough to know that fornication is wrong - or they only use Biblical Principles when it doesn't put them at odds with their own desire or the culture. Either way is bad news.

Church Attendance, Bible Study and Prayer

There are apparently some huge problems with the way these Born Again Protestants think – most don't hold to even a Basic Biblical worldview, much less an Expanded Biblical worldview, they tend to hold pluralistic ideas and are confused about Christ and salvation, more than half don't look to the Bible to help them make moral decisions, and the ones that say they do don't appear to actually do it (at least in the case of sexual morality).

Assuming most of these Born Again Protestants are believers, don't these believers know what the Bible says about these things? If they don't, why are they so Biblically illiterate? Let's look at the things believers need to do in order to know what the Bible says - Church attendance, personal Bible study and prayer.

Here are the numbers for Born Again Protestants:

Church, Bible Study and Prayer

- *57% of Born Again Protestants attend church at least once a month.*
- *42% read the Bible at least weekly.*
- *65% pray at least daily.*

Let's narrow it down a little more:

- *45% of Born Again Protestants attend church at least twice a month.*
- *22% read the Bible daily.*
- *27% pray multiple times per day.*

When you look at these numbers it makes you wonder – where are these believers getting information about the content of their faith? They aren't getting it from church – 43% don't attend church even once a month. They aren't getting it from personal Bible study – 58% don't read their Bible at least weekly.

Maybe the numbers don't pick up the people who are getting Bible teaching through podcasts or livestream. This could lead to lower church attendance, but you would expect that Bible study numbers to be higher if that was the case.

There is a kind of a tendency to pray, but what do they know about prayer if they don't know what the Bible teaches about prayer?

Based on these numbers, it surely looks like these Born Again Protestants aren't taking the time to learn much about what God's word says.

Observations

1. **There seems to be an astounding lack of Biblical literacy in this group of Born Again Protestants.** It looks like this group of mostly believers are ignorant of the Bible. They don't know what it says. If that is the case, they cannot mature spiritually. They cannot live by faith because there isn't much content to their faith. They cannot discern truth from error. They cannot properly make moral decisions. They cannot defend against the attacks of the world, the flesh and Satan.

It also looks like they are aware of some basic truths from the Bible, but are attempting to syncretize these truths with the pagan thoughts and ideas that pervade our culture – like pluralism and relativism. It's like the Israelites in Canaan – the Israelites disregarded what God had revealed to them and their minds became infected with the worldview of the pagan Canaanites.

There does not seem to be a high regard or desire for learning what's in the Bible.

2. **The Church in America is in trouble.** In all the areas we looked at, there has been a decline between 2010 and 2020. The trend seems to be that the church is getting sicker. Also – I'm sure you noticed that the younger age group of Born Again Protestants seems to be even less Biblically grounded than the older age groups. This may be a function of age and they may become more grounded as they get older. However, they are not starting from a very good place. All will need to make more of an effort than they apparently do to learn the Bible.
3. **Not Many Are Attending Church or Studying the Bible On Their Own.** Unless a significant number of these people are getting good Biblical instruction from sources like internet, podcasts or livestream – they have no way of knowing what the Bible says. I fear that the information they get about the Bible is filtered through social media and other pop culture sources.

Also – if they don't go to a local church, they are disobeying Scripture. Hebrews 10:24-25 says:

Hebrews 10:24–25

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The local church is critical to the life of a believer. It is there to minister to believers. A place we learn Scripture. A place we stimulate each other to love and good deeds. A place we encourage each other. A place we love each other. A place we serve each other. A place we help keep each other in line and grow spiritually. If you don't go to church, you cut

yourself off from God's Biblical support system. If you don't go to church, you cut yourself off from opportunities to minister to your brothers and sisters in Christ when they need it. When believers cut themselves off from the local church, they weaken themselves as well as the universal church.

4. **Children Are In Danger.** If Christian parents are not Biblically literate, and if they are not attending a church, where are their children getting Biblical instruction? These children are in danger. Many may not even come to faith in Christ. The ones that do will not grow spiritually and will not be able to defend themselves against the thoughts and ideas of the culture. Young people spend most of their time at school and with their peers and will be influenced by them unless they are given a good Biblical foundation for their faith. The trends in the data indicate that this has been happening for years.
5. **Our Culture Is In Danger.** One of the very first things we talked about was that there are probably still a significant number of Christians in America. We also said God is certainly able to use us to influence the culture if we are faithful servants. However, if we Christians continue down this path of Biblical illiteracy, we will be unequipped to spiritually influence our culture. 1 Peter 3:15 says:

1 Peter 3:15 (NASB95)

¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

If you are Biblically illiterate, how can you make a Biblical defense? If you can't make a Biblical defense of your belief, how can you influence anyone?

6. **Our Country Is In Danger.** If Christians are no longer able to spiritually influence our culture, our country will become more and more paganized in its way of thinking. A godless culture will elect godless leaders. These surveys show that we are already way down that road.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

To help us think about what to do, let's go look at what happened in Israel between Joshua's generation and the end of Judges.

After God had delivered the Promised Land to the Israelites, Joshua called the nation to Shechem and addressed them one more time just before he died. Let's look at a part of his address:

Joshua 24:14–18 (NASB95)

¹⁴ "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." ¹⁶ The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷ for the Lord our God is He who brought us and

our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. ¹⁸ “The Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”

In Judges 2:6-7 we get God’s evaluation of Joshua and his generation:

Judges 2:6–7 (NASB95)

⁶ When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. ⁷ The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel.

The generation of Israelites who God used to conquer the pagan nations in the land “**served the lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua.**” Israel started out in the land on the right track. Joshua, the leadership and the people all served the Lord.

But look at what happened to Israel after the Joshua generation died:

Judges 2:8–10 (NASB95)

⁸ Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

There arose another generation who did not know the Lord or what He had done for Israel.

We all know what this led to:

Judges 2:11–12 (NASB95)

¹¹ Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

And:

Judges 21:25 (NASB95)

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

So – Israel started out serving God and in a few generations they turned away from God, turned to other gods, and everyone “did what was right in their own eyes” – they rejected God’s standards of behavior and replaced it with their own.

This didn’t take very long. It was quick – they tanked in only a few generations. How does this kind of thing happen so quickly in a culture? First, let’s see what we can glean from these passages in Judges.

First, what characterized the Joshua generation? Look back at Joshua 24:16-18:

Joshua 24:16–18 (NASB95)

¹⁶ The people answered and said, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷ for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. ¹⁸ “The Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”

The Israel of the Joshua generation was characterized by belief in God and a desire to serve Him. All of them knew what God had done for them from the Exodus to the Conquest. Some of them had experienced all of it, and everyone had experienced the miraculous provision and military victories God did for them before and after they crossed the Jordan. They knew God - they learned about His character and attributes from His revelation of Himself to them through His words and His works - and because they knew Him they desired to serve Him.

So, what characterized the generations after that? Look Judges 2:10 again:

Judges 2:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

The apostate generations were characterized by unbelief which was connected with an ignorance of what the Moses and Joshua generations had clearly learned about God. The apostate generations forgot about His Power - how He had delivered them out of Egypt and what He had done to the Egyptians in the process. They forgot about His discipline – that a whole generation of them died in the wilderness because they refused to obey and enter the land at Kadesh Barnea. They forgot about how He gave them food and water and kept their clothes and shoes from wearing out the whole time they were wandering around. They forgot about His faithfulness to His promises – that after the 40 years wandering was up, He brought them into the land and defeated their enemies in the land. They forgot His Law and the covenant the He had made with them. They forgot the whole book of Deuteronomy because it revealed exactly what was going to happen to them when they forgot about Him.

I think that is what has been happening to the church in our American culture. America as a nation started out in a pretty good place. Our nation started out as a God-fearing nation. People took the Bible as God’s word and tried to live by it in faith – or at least accepted its moral and ethical principles. Though there were certainly pagan influences in the culture, the church in America was strong and America’s morals and ethics were derived from Biblical morals and ethics. But, for some reason, like the Israelites, our country has in a sense become predominantly a people who **“who do not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He has done.”**

Look at George Washington’s Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789. Can you imagine our government producing something like this now?

By the President of the United States of America, a Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor-- and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be-- That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks--for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation--for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war--for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed--for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted--for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

and also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions-- to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually--to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed--to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord--To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and us-- and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

Go: Washington

We've gone from that to a culture that doesn't think it needs God at all. That we can live without Him.

And this change in our culture has affected the church in America, as we can see from the answers to these questions. Instead of being a Biblical influence in our culture, the church is being influenced by our culture. This has been going on for years. Just like the Israelites forgot God and the pagan cultures around them infected their beliefs, the church is forgetting the Lord and all the work He has done, and is being infected by the pagan ideas that permeate our culture.

WHAT DO WE DO?

If we can Biblically diagnose how the church got here, we can figure out a Biblical response. If even the church in America is getting to the point where – in a sense - it doesn't "know the Lord and all the work He has done", the church needs to change. Because I'm referring to the church in the Biblical sense – believers who are part of the whole body of Christ - I don't mean the church doesn't know the Lord in the sense of unbelief – I mean that the church doesn't know the Lord in the sense of the kind of knowledge that comes from fellowship with God through a mature knowledge of and desire for His Word and living it by faith. In this sense, the church needs to "know the Lord and all the work He has done." So, here are some suggestions:

1. **Each of us has to make sure that we "know the Lord and all the work He has done".** We have to be diligent and take the time to study the Bible. We have to believe what God has revealed to us in the Bible and be committed to living by it in faith – no matter what our own desires or our culture may throw at us. This has never been real easy, but the state of our culture is making it a lot harder.
2. **Each of us has to do what it takes to make sure our families "know the Lord and all the work He has done".** Those of us with children still at home need to be diligent about training them up in the ways of the Lord. In Deuteronomy 6, God commanded Israel to do this and I suggest that their failure to obey this command was a huge factor in their apostasy. In the New Testament, Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 command us to train our children and I am convinced that our failure to do to obey this command is a reason for the decline of the church.

Parents are responsible for making sure their children are trained so that the next generation doesn't forget about God. Those of us with grown children need to encourage them to be diligent about training their children and help them however we can.

3. **We Need To Serve In A Local Church.** We talked about this earlier. The local church is critical to the life of a believer. It is there to minister to believers. When believers cut themselves off from the local church, they weaken themselves as well as the whole body of Christ.

As an aside – if we can't find the "perfect church" we can't let that keep us from attending a church. Sometimes this can be used as an excuse to avoid church. Granted it may be difficult if there isn't a church in the area that will teach the Word accurately; however, in that case, the believer needs to pray for wisdom and consider the options. It may take some effort to obey the command to assemble together. Based on the survey data, churches that teach the Word accurately are going to be harder and harder to find. We can't let that stop us from gathering and ministering to each other.

4. **The Local Church Must Be Committed to Teaching The Entire Bible Accurately.** The local church is still the best source for instructing believers and helping them grow in their knowledge of the Bible. It must do its job of teaching the Bible clearly and accurately and not shy away from hard passages or teaching in depth.
5. **We Must Evangelize And Disciple Others.** We need to share our faith and take every opportunity God gives us to bring others to Christ, as well as teach them what we can

about the Bible. We have to make sure we are equipped to do that. At this point in our culture, we can't assume that people know very much, if anything, about the Bible or the gospel. We have to be prepared to interact with them in the same way Paul had to approach the Gentiles in Acts. We can't rely on common Biblical knowledge or common cultural ethics. We are going to have to be able to evangelize in ways that will be much harder than they were a few generations ago.

6. **We Must Be Above Reproach.** We need to make sure that our behavior is above reproach. Look at Paul's instructions to Titus:

Titus 2:7–8 (NASB95)

⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Unbelievers are thrilled to when our own behavior gives them the ammunition to shoot us down. Our behavior may very well turn people away from God. Our behavior can dishearten and weaken our fellow believers. So – we need to think before we act.

7. **If Things Get Worse, We Must Not Be Discouraged.** We already know that in the course of God's plan for history, things are going to get worse before the church is raptured:

2 Timothy 3:1–5 (NASB95)

¹ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

However, we don't know if this is it - God in His mercy could turn things around and delay the end of these days for a season. So, if we do our job – and God turns things around - we can rejoice because we have been used by God to turn things around. But if we do our job – and He doesn't turn things around - we can rejoice because we will have proven to be faithful servants to Him. Either way we can rejoice – **if** we are diligent and do our job.

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

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ⁱⁱⁱ Although most people selected only one answer, on this question they could select multiple answers