

**Objections to Christianity**

Group 6

5/22/2013 7:30 PM

Phoenix AZ

**(0:03:10.3) INTRODUCTIONS . . . DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY UNIT AND OCCUPATION, AND WHAT IS YOUR NAME?**

**Patrick:** Single guy, live in downtown Phoenix. Work in pro sports, yes.

**(0:03:49.1) WHO DO YOU GO HOME TO?**

**Patrick:** Empty house most times. I foster Schnauzers every once in a while. I don't have any right now, but I've had about eleven in the last two years. Yes, that's neat.

**Noah:** I'm from DC originally, and I'm now in South Phoenix. I also work in sports, which is random. I have two roommates and no pets currently.

**(0:04:29.5) WHAT DO YOU DO IN SPORTS?**

**Noah:** (0:04:31.8 Unclear/multiple speakers). I work in game operations, the live entertainment stuff that happens.

**(0:04:40.0) WHAT DO YOU DO?**

**Patrick:** I work for Major League Baseball's advanced media division. Then I'm also the PA announcer for the Rockies during spring training.

**(0:04:50.8) YOU?**

**Josh:** I live downtown. I work in law. I have a miniature Schnauzer, a cat, a little boy.

**Male respondent:** (0:05:07.2 Unclear/multiple speakers).

**Patrick:** Everyone has to have something.

**Josh:** Yes. (0:05:12.1 Unclear/multiple speakers). A little boy and another something on the way.

**Noah:** Congratulations.

**(0:05:22.4) HOW OLD IS YOUR BOY?**

**Josh:** Sixteen months now.

**Todd:** I'm married, two kids, and a dog and a cat. I'm a teacher. I live out in Chandler.

**(0:05:41.6) WHAT DO YOU TEACH?**

**Todd:** Eighth grade Social Studies. That's a rough age.

**Male respondent:** I'm sorry.

**John:** I work in the hospitality industry for a corporate office. I go home to a girlfriend and a mean cat. That's pretty much about it . . .

**(0:06:23.9) A MEAN CAT?**

**John:** He was actually a feral cat that she took in and basically hand fed. This thing is just nasty.

**(0:06:36.9) YOU DON'T TELL HER THAT, THOUGH.**

**John:** No. I also have a roommate who travels quite frequently, so the trade-off was she moves in, she can bring the cat if I keep my roommate and get the extra income. *(Laughter.)*

**(0:06:49.1) IT'S A NEGOTIATION.**

**John:** Yes.

**Carl:** I'm married; I have two small kids and a dog. I work for the family business.

**(0:06:59.9) WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS?**

**Carl:** We have a laser light show division and a chemical division. Opposite extremes.

**(0:07:12.9) DO YOU RUN THE BUSINESS?**

**Carl:** Yes.

**(0:07:17.8) THANKS FOR BEING HERE. I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT OUT.**

**Carl:** This is escape.

**John 2:** I live in South Scottsdale. I have a girlfriend who lives with me; I have a son who lives in Arkansas. I work for a pharmaceutical company.

**(0:07:40.1) ARE YOU IN SALES, MANAGEMENT?**

**John 2:** No.

**(0:07:42.9) MANUFACTURING?**

**John 2:** No. I'm a courier.

**Nick:** Married, two kids, one on the way. In technical support for a cable company.

**(0:08:11.5) HOW OLD ARE THE KIDS?**

**Nick:** Eleven and six.

**(0:08:34.7-0:08:50.6 MODERATOR DESCRIBES THE UPCOMING DISCUSSION.)****(0:08:50.6) WHEN I SAY CHRISTIANITY, CHURCH, JESUS, WHAT ARE YOUR IMMEDIATE THOUGHTS?**

**Male respondent:** Faith.

**Patrick:** A big wide umbrella that a bunch of peoples' beliefs and values and morals fall under but that also get manipulated and directed in certain ways for certain benefits.

**(0:09:23.5) A WIDE WHAT?**

**Patrick:** An umbrella, because there's, I don't know, how many denominations that would call themselves Christian that can have very differing beliefs as to what that all means.

**Male respondent:** I was just going to say all encompassing. Christianity pretty much touches everything in everyday life. You probably can't go through a day without seeing something that's associated or hearing about it, or seeing a church or whatever. It's everywhere.

**(0:09:57.0) ANYONE ELSE?**

*(No response.)*

**(0:10:05.5) WHEN I MENTION CHRISTIANITY, WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU THINK OF?**

**Male respondent:** *(0:10:11.3 Unclear/whisper).*

**Noah:** I think of the majority. *(One respondent agreed.)* Yes, that's what I think.

**(0:10:23.7) WHAT DO YOU MEAN?**

**Noah:** I just mean that the vast majority of the people I know would consider themselves Christian.

**Male respondent:** I think mainstream. That's a very large religious group in society.

**(0:10:43.4) DESCRIBE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRISTIANITY.**

**Josh:** Probably be reserved, because it's a religion and depending on who you're talking to it's a sensitive—

**Male respondent:** It's definitely a hot button. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Josh:** Sensitive topic.

**Male respondent:** It's one of those things you don't talk about in the workplace; religion, politics, and sex, I guess, are three things you don't really talk about in the workplace.

**Josh:** And if somebody does sometimes, you wonder, did they come on too strong, or not? I think even at work I see people that have the bottom line of their emails and it can be a quote from the Bible or something like that. Sometimes it's totally appropriate and sometimes you think there's some people that really could turn off. Some people are extra sensitive to it.

**(0:11:38.4-0:12:10.2) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRISTIANITY AND WHERE DID THAT ATTITUDE EVOLVE?**

**Patrick:** I can tell you for me. I grew up in a very Catholic household. Raised by a single mom who had a very difficult relationship with the Catholic Church. It was when I went to college and I went to a Jesuit university that I was taught to think. I was taught to look outside of just faith and look towards science and look towards other things and there was all those things. There's a lot of things that we don't understand how the world works in history, future, everything like that. Christianity, any religion, at some level tries to fill those voids. There's a significant number of people who take that beyond that and it becomes a conflict, or it becomes confrontational, or it becomes judgmental if you don't agree with what they're saying. When you talk about Christianity, it's such a wide thing. For me, it's use the thing between your ears first, and then try and see what you can get to, and if that doesn't resolve everything neatly, then maybe there is something else out there. But don't go "something else out there" first and deny reality, second. That's where it's just too hard for me to sit there and say one quick answer (0:13:30.1 unclear/cough).

**(0:13:35.6) ANYONE ELSE HAVE A STORY?**

**Carl:** I went to a Lutheran parochial school and that actually turned me off from going to church for a number of years. It wasn't until I became married that we started going back to church and revisiting the belief structure. In general, when I think of Christianity, I think of it more of a set of guidelines how to live a good life, how to do good and do less wrong. The essence of the Golden Rule, it's a way to live your life properly.

**Nick:** I've had the opposite situation. I was raised very Catholic. I went through the catechism every week, Thursdays. That went on for a couple of years and then we moved out of state and I didn't start going to catechism for a long time. When I started again, it didn't really make any sense. There were a lot of questions that it just didn't have any answers for. I stopped going to church for a long time, years. Then I started going out with my girlfriend, who is now my wife. We had a child out of wedlock (0:14:58.9 unclear/cough) religion again and found out all these moral sins. The child's not baptized; basically I'd have to go to a priest and get special permission and have all this stuff done to be able to basically cleanse my soul, in a way. That just made me go, "No, I can't take any more." The guilt, I'm done with it.

**(0:15:23.4) WAS IT ALL ABOUT GUILT?**

**Nick:** Yes. It's basically feels like a big religion built on guilt and what you should atone for and that just turns me off completely. I don't agree with it, I don't think that what I did was wrong, that I would go to hell for it. So, yes—

**(0:15:46.9) YOU DON'T THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GO TO HELL FOR IT?**

**Nick:** Right.

**(0:15:49.5) YOU DO THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GO TO HELL FOR IT?**

**Nick:** I don't think hell is defined as everybody else thinks.

**(0:15:54.9) DID THEY SAY YOU WERE GOING TO GO TO HELL FOR IT?**

**Nick:** Right. They did. Yes.

**Noah:** I guess I'm a little different where my dad is Catholic, my mom is Jewish. I've never grown up religious at all. I never went to any kind of church other than for a function, wedding, something like that. Just from an early age I was fairly skeptical just because I didn't know much about it. I had a lot of friends that were from varying degrees of religious—I guess I'm just a little skeptical more of organized religion as a whole, not just Christianity. Like I said I just feel like the majority of people that I know and friends that I've had throughout my life have been Christian. I think that the idea is good. It's a set of guidelines of how you should live your life and things like that, but I think that sometimes people take it very literally, the Bible, and use religion for ways that it wasn't meant for. I've always been set back from the whole religious experience, I guess.

**John:** A lot of people use it as a crutch, I think. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(0:17:17.3) CHRISTIANITY?**

**Male respondent:** Yes. Religion in general, or Christianity. Everybody talked about the Golden Rule and morality and doing what's right and that kind of thing. A lot of people lean on religion, or Christianity, to say, "Christianity told me that I can't commit sins, I shouldn't adulterize, I shouldn't murder, and I shouldn't steal," and that kind of thing. I don't feel, for me personally, that I need that to tell me, the religion or Christianity to tell me that I shouldn't be doing these things.

**Male respondent:** And sometimes, depending on which church you go to, the rules are different, which can be confusing. I don't look at Christianity as a thing; it's a blanket term for a lot of things. I have different Christian friends. I'm not Christian, but I have different Christian friends that totally believe some things are okay and some are not. They have heated arguments about it. It's tough for me to say just one set of values or rules is Christianity.

**(0:18:31.5) WHEN I SAY CHURCH, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?**

**Todd:** I'll go first then. Right now my wife goes to church with my kids and I have mixed feelings about it. She feels really strongly about it and goes every week. She won't miss it for anything. You know what I mean? She's just on a real kick right now. She wasn't always like that, but she's like that right now.

**(0:19:02.5) HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?**

**Todd:** Probably in the last year or so, but she wasn't like that before. She grew up going to church, and I went to church off and on, growing up. I hate to go. It's just so boring. I would do anything but that. I try to think of what project can I do around the house that will let me stay home. Now I pretty much just stay home all the time. I have mixed feelings about it because with my kids, I don't really like them getting indoctrinated, like Noah was saying. I'd rather have them just be a little more skeptical and not just believe something that people are telling them without questioning.

**(0:20:00.3) HOW ABOUT YOU?**

**John:** How do I feel about church? Like I said, I don't go to church. I wasn't brought up—I was Catholic, but we never—divorced the parents, they're already out of the— it was never taught to me, religion. I guess you go to church when they pass round the basket to collect money. That bothers me. I watch the TV shows where he's got \$1,000 suits, and I'm just—

**(0:20:34.7) WHAT TV SHOWS?**

**John:** I even wrote a report on Creflo A. Dollar. And of course his last name is Dollar. He's the black pastor, priest, whatever. He wears the purple suits and just really expensive. I don't know, just the money and church in general, I don't know.

**(0:20:58.6) WHEN YOU THINK OF CHURCH, YOU THINK OF IT AS WHAT?**

**John:** A business. And dirt floor, that's what I would like it. Outside, there shouldn't be any kind of money. I understand to pay for the church and the building and the electricity. I don't know, it's a business. I wish it wasn't like that.

**(0:21:27.3) DOES IT HAVE TO BE A BUSINESS IN ORDER TO FUNCTION?**

**John:** I don't know. Money—

**(0:21:45.5) WHY DO YOU WISH IT DIDN'T HAVE TO BE A BUSINESS?**

**John:** I guess I don't want to see money mixed in with religion. I don't know. I see these multimillion-dollar churches being built and the cost—

**(0:22:17.5) THE BUILDINGS?**

**John:** The buildings, churches, yes, pay for the living for the priest and the nuns and what have you.

**(0:22:24.6) WHAT COULD BE A BETTER CHOICE?**

**John:** Outside. Volunteer. (0:22:31.1 *Unclear/cough*) having dirt floors, not even chairs to—I don’t know, just absolutely showing up, talking and leaving. There’s no huge TV stations and broadcasting and—

**Male respondent:** Flaunting of wealth.

**John:** Right. It’s the exact opposite. You think of Jesus, robe, homeless people the people didn’t want, and then you’ve got these pastors with the gold and everything. It really bothers me. I just listen to them just to listen to them read parts of the Bible, then I turn it when he starts his opinion about it, or her.

**(0:23:22.6) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** This isn’t my experience, but I have friends that, I want to say John, you mentioned religion tends to be a crutch for some people. I have friends that they go out every night and they drink a ton and they take women home every night and then wake up and make sure they Tweet, “Oh, man, I can’t miss church today.” Loving that they’re taking the picture and acting like, “Oh, man, I’m at church.”

**Male respondent:** Really?

**Male respondent:** Oh, yes. To me they’re such hypocrites. Every time they take the picture of the church and, “Had such a great time at study today,” whatever. To me they sound so foolish.

**Nick:** That’s the other side of that Catholic coin where, “I can do whatever I want, just go and confess and I’m absolved of all my sins.”

**Male respondent:** I have always had a problem with that myself.

**Male respondent:** God forgives, right? (*Laughter.*)

**(0:24:34.1) ANYONE ELSE ON “CHURCH”?**

**Male respondent:** I’ll just jump in on these last few comments. Like what John was saying about the other alternative is—I just like how you go and do good works and be a good person. I see a lot of hypocrisy as well. Like it’s a club or something like that. (*One respondent agreed.*) If you would be more open about . . . that might not be all there is to it. Do you know what I mean? Some people would shun you. Even though they’re some of the nastiest people that you know.

**(0:25:05.8) WHAT DO YOU MEAN “SHUN YOU”?**

**Male respondent:** I’m just saying that if you were like, “You know what? I don’t know if I totally believe . . .” Do you know what I mean? “All this stuff.” When people are saying all this real religious stuff to you, do you know what I mean? You just have to be like, “All right.” If someone sent out an email with “Jesus loves you” or something on the bottom, you can’t be like—it’s a little much. Maybe tone it down a little bit.

**Male respondent:** If you don’t forward this . . .

**(0:25:31.9) PARDON?**

**Male respondent:** Like, “If you don’t forward this message, God will hate you.”

**Patrick:** I will just say from the organization—having grown up around the organizational side of the Catholic Church, that’s my biggest issue, is having seen the way that they protect their own at the expense of victims is probably the one thing that does make me root for a hell.

**(0:26:01.4) ROOT FOR HELL?**

**Patrick:** Yes. And I only say it—I’m not trying to be sensational. My father was a Catholic priest who raped my mother and he was protected his whole life. I’ve seen dozens of those people.

**Male respondent:** They will get theirs on Judgment Day.

**Patrick:** When you talk about “the church,” I have problems with the organization because it is a boys’ club. It’s a protected club for itself. On the money side it’s looking out for its own. You see it worldwide. Little kids, women, you’ve seen it time and time again, and that’s where I have my biggest issue, because then everything else falls out from underneath it.

**(0:26:51.3) THEY CLOSE RANKS AROUND THEIR OWN?**

**Patrick:** Oh, absolutely. They will protect their own to the death.

**(0:26:56.7) LIKE THE MEDICAL SOCIETIES.**

**Patrick:** It’s why they fight criminal prosecution so hard, because they say, “Well, no, we’ll handle it on our own.” “Why should you handle it on your own? Call the Phoenix Police Department.” “No, no, no. We’ll handle it on our own.” Try and get that somewhere else. Again, that’s where organized religion has leverage: they know the sergeant, the sergeant goes to church, and the church, “Oh, no, no sergeant, we’ll take care.” That’s where I have my biggest issue.

**(0:27:35.6) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF CHRISTIANS?**

**Male respondent:** I had a friend that took his religion too far. Kind of like a crutch for his beliefs. I have a friend that’s a Buddhist monk and I asked him to perform the wedding ceremony for my wife and I, and one of my good friends from childhood refused to come to our wedding because, how dare we have a Buddhist perform our ceremony? It’s not our fault we wanted to do something different that would be memorable. We’ve all been to cookie cutter weddings—they all seem the same—so we wanted to do something different. But this one guy that I had known since third grade, he, for lack of a better term, he thumped his Bible a little too hard for my tastes. He insisted that my wife and I would go to hell for not having a Christian ceremony. I couldn’t believe that. Then again, that falls in line with a lot of the wars of ancient times that were fought in the name of God. When I think of Christians, it’s a mix of people that really are good people and a mix of people like that that are just the biggest hypocrites. They see what they want to see in the Bible, yet they don’t realize they’re supposed to love everybody. They’re



supposed to be compassionate for everybody, not just pick and choose. *(One respondent agreed.)* That's what I think of.

**(0:29:21.2) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** Sorry, it's such a range.

**(0:29:34.1) BECAUSE IT'S THE MAJORITY?**

**Male respondent:** It's just a tough question because I don't want to focus on the people that do negative things and things like that, or people that I've had problems with that are Christians that have said stupid things to me. Your question is almost like asking, "What are your thoughts on humans?" There are stupid humans and there are smart humans. Some people take their religion very seriously, and if they are doing it for the right reasons and it's because they need something to help them in a situation, then good for them. If they are someone that's trying to push that onto me, that I don't like. I've had experiences with both.

**(0:30:20.3) I WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCES YOU'VE HAD, GOOD AND BAD.**

**Male respondent:** I think a big thing for me, at least, is when people are so out with their religion where it's just so in your face and it's so pushy on me. I really don't like that. It really turns me off. Even when it's not forceful. I find it odd sometimes because I think that your relationship with God and religion is just something that you should share with yourself and God. I don't think that it's something that should always be talked about and always be out there. When I'm driving on the highway and I see a billboard that just says, "Jesus is the Lord" really big, it's not that I have a problem with it; I just find it strange a little bit. I don't see "Allah is the Lord" billboards and then whatever other things they put on—

**Male respondent:** The Christians won't tolerate "Allah is the Lord" billboards in this town.

**Male respondent:** It's true. I just don't see it with any other religion where it's like that. Maybe that's just because, like I said, for me and the people I know, I feel like Christianity is the majority, but I just see that out of Christians a lot more, where they're very outspoken with their religion.

**Male respondent:** They're in your face.

**Male respondent:** And a little more in your face.

**(0:31:57.0) WHAT IS OUTSPOKEN, WHAT IS IN YOUR FACE?**

**Patrick:** Ten thirty o'clock on a Saturday night, my friend's twelfth wedding anniversary. His mother-in-law looks me square in the eye, she says, "You believe in God, right?" We proceed to have an hour-long discussion as to why I don't. *(Laughter.)* She proceeded to call me the devil and then said, "I pray you get a DUI on the way home."

**Male respondent:** Nice.

**(0:32:24.8) REALLY?**

**Patrick:** Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*) I was very rational and logical. Then she proceeds to say, “He’s got anger problems, he’s got all this other stuff.” All my friends are like, “He’s asleep half the time. He’s the chilliest guy we know.” Which I try and be. I don’t like getting riled up. To her, she couldn’t accept that someone had a different thought as to God.

**Male respondent:** It’s intolerance.

**Patrick:** The Bible. And all this, her little world didn’t have any alternatives. It was either that or you were just—I think she saw horns coming out of my head.

**(0:33:12.2) YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW?**

**Patrick:** No, my friend’s mother-in-law. Yes, yes. No, no. I wouldn’t tolerate that. No, no.

**Male respondent:** It’s almost like tunnel vision. They see what they want to see, and if you’re not within that vision then you’re (*0:33:25.5 unclear*).

**Male respondent:** That’s why a lot of religious conflicts happen. Christians versus Muslims and so on. (*One respondent agreed.*) As far as the “in your face” aspect of it, I’ve done a bit of travelling around the world and you have to look to find the religious sanctuaries of all these other religions. Christianity? Anybody ever seen that three-hundred-foot concrete cross in the Midwest, driving cross country? There’s a half dozen of them. Some small towns in Missouri, every other billboard: “Jesus saves.” You don’t see that with other religions. You don’t see that with Buddhism, you don’t see that with Muslims. That seems to be mainly a Christian thing as far as just flaunting it everywhere you look.

**Male respondent:** Or even those megachurches. (*Several respondents agreed.*) We have one here, Christ’s Church of the Valley.

**Carl:** Yes, you see the little bumper stickers on the cars all the time.

**Male respondent:** The CCV, yes. It’s ginormous.

**Carl:** I did a laser show for one of the youth parties one time. I couldn’t believe the parking lot, it was the size of some small towns.

**(0:34:28.8) NORMALLY A LOT OF PEOPLE AT AN EVENT WOULD BE A GOOD THING. WHY IS IT A NEGATIVE FOR A CHURCH?**

**Male respondent:** Just from the aspect that it’s in your face. Like Noah was saying, it’s a relationship with God that you have, personally. (*One respondent agreed.*) Religion should be more about that in terms of your relationship rather than filling up a stadium full of people to worship.

**Josh:** For me, it’s almost like it’s a brand. People are putting bumper stickers on their car just like they would put a Diamondbacks sticker on their car. Or, just like they would put a radio station’s bumper

sticker on their car. Do you know what I mean? That whole idea of carrying the message, which I'm not opposed to with Christianity, that's live your life, do your business, go about your work with integrity and purity of intention and all the other stuff. You can do that without a bumper sticker. But when you put the bumper sticker on and you put the T-shirt on and you hold the sign, then it's like—

**Male respondent:** Posting about it on Facebook. *(Laughter.)*

**Josh:** Right. Like you were saying about your friends would be on Facebook, and all sorts of things. Are you living the life, or are you just tooting the horn? *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** That's a good way to put it.

### **(0:36:00.3) WHAT DOES A CHURCH COMPROMISE BY BEING MASSIVE?**

**Carl:** The personal connection. In a small church the people line up, shake the pastor's hand on the way out. I've never been to a megachurch, but I don't see that happening when there's several thousand people in the building.

**Male respondent:** They have multiple pastors, though.

**Male respondent:** *(0:36:33.0 Unclear/multiple speakers)* assembly line for hand shakers?

**Male respondent:** I think so. *(Laughter.)* I've never been, but I've heard things.

### **(0:36:38.3) WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO ADD?**

**Male respondent:** Are you worshipping the pastor or priest, or are you worshipping God at that point?

**Male respondent:** I've been to one megachurch once. It was a very strange experience for me. I had seen on TV and heard that these things existed. It was really like a rock concert and these pastors are the rock stars. It's like what you just said. These people love this pastor. It's almost like it's not even about God anymore. It's about being a part of a club and almost like having a good time and listening to this pastor and having the experience of listening to him. It was just very strange to me. I don't know if they're all like that, but I'm saying just the one I went to the one time, it was very odd.

**Male respondent:** Bringing it back to the idea of business. It's just big business. They find a real good speaker that'll bring people in and a good band. These stickers are part of the branding of the business and the club and all that stuff.

### **(0:37:47.1) THE PURPOSE OF THAT IS WHAT?**

**Male respondent:** Recruitment. *(Laughter.)*

**Male respondent:** I think part of it is just to grow the business and get more money.

**Male respondent:** It's like the Walmart of religion.

**Male respondent:** If you have one ginormous church you want to get enough money to open up the West Valley Ginormous Church, or the Tucson Ginormous Church. Just grow and grow and grow.

**(0:38:12.5) WHAT'S THE POINT OF GROWING?**

**Male respondent:** Convert people. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(0:38:18.9) WHY?**

**Male respondent:** More members, more revenue, more income.

**Male respondent:** I think accumulating assets—I think, doesn't the Vatican have the biggest art collection in the world?

**Male respondent:** Christianity is the biggest real estate holder in the world, something like that. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(0:38:34.4) WHERE DO YOU READ THIS?**

**Male respondent:** *(0:38:40.7 Unclear/laughter).*

**(0:38:56.7) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF JESUS?**

**Male respondent:** He's a teacher of good messages.

**Male respondent:** He has long hair and a beard.

**Male respondent:** A Jew.

**Male respondent:** Mythical.

**Male respondent:** Symbol. Humble.

**Male respondent:** False idol.

**Male respondent:** He's definitely used as a false idol, that's for sure.

**Male respondent:** A lot of statues. Statues.

**(0:39:47.4) YOU SAID MYTHICAL?**

**Male respondent:** Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)*

**(0:39:50.7) WHY MYTHICAL?**

**Male respondent:** I guess I've been falling away from Christianity a lot more and faster in the past year, but just learning—I took some mythology in college, years ago, and also watched another movie recently called *Zeitgeist* that just shows in all religions they all have the virgin birth, of December 25th,

the twelve apostles, arose and dead, even way before Jesus. They all follow the exact same—even though it was thousands of years before Christ and it was just the Egyptians and it's like, "Okay, we created this"—how can that be? All around the world they had the same story. December 25th, virgin birth, died, rose, twelve apostles. They all did. It's like, "All right, we're following this one too to keep us in line." I don't know, I want to believe that. The rose, died for his sins, and all that, I really don't believe there was. I've learned of the other mythology, Greek mythology, Egyptian, they all—you can look it up, it's all the same but two thousand years before Christ. And it even had the exact same—astrology is what it is and it's about the (0:41:31.8 *unclear*), the twelve months, the twelve apostles, the solar, the sun, you see how the cross, and it's got the circle around it you see on top of the church. It's the symbol of the, the astrology symbol. It's—I don't know—if you just watch that movie or—

**Male respondent:** What's it called?

**Male respondent:** *Zeitgeist*. And any other ones. If you read any kind of mythology about different religions, they all mirror the exact same, worldwide, thousands of miles apart, how did they have the exact same views but different names, different was of the virgin birth. It really makes you think. I don't know. Like I said, I do wish there was, but the more that I learn, it makes me almost sad for other people that get just duped into it. Uninformed, uneducated about it, and not thinking for themselves, they're just following the organized religion instead of thinking for themselves. Going back to the megachurches, all these people can't think for themselves. They have to join—I don't know. I even read that the more educated you are, it seems that the further away you go away from Christianity. You look into it and you read it and you compare the other, it's like, "All right, well something doesn't really add up here." You have the other people that, "Yes, whatever you say. Sure . . ."

#### (0:43:21.4) THOSE ARE THE LESS EDUCATED?

**Male respondent:** I think so. I believe so. I'm even wanting to hold on to it because it's what my parents grew up, and their parents did. So, I defend it. Why am I defending it? Because my parents grew up with that too. I think that's (0:43:36.9 *unclear*) goes slowly, gets let go throughout the generations. But I'm quick to say, "That's not"—you made that comment, I don't know if you were joking, he made the comment on they'll meet their—what did you say on the—

**Male respondent:** Judgment Day?

**Male respondent:** Yes, Judgment Day. I don't know if you were joking about that or not. I had the view of this group from the phone calls that we all had pulled away from Christianity. I doubt they would put us in a group where it was . . .

**Male respondent:** One strong—

**Male respondent:** Right. I think we all had the same view. That's why they kind of put us in here.

**Male respondent:** I'm actually a pastor, so— (*Laughter.*)

**Male respondent:** All right, I'm done rambling.

**(0:44:25.8) WHAT WAS YOUR COMMENT WHEN I ASKED ABOUT JESUS?**

**Male respondent:** Just a guy with a beard and long hair. I don't have any doubt that he existed. He very well may have been a person, but was he the Son of God? *(Laughter.)*

**Male respondent:** I know a guy at work named Jesus. *(Laughter.)*

**(0:45:05.1) WHAT DID YOU SAY?**

**Male respondent:** A symbol. A symbol of hope. People need something to basically base their faith off of because they don't have a definitive answer to a question. They have some guy, he does some things, a few people witness it, they have credibility. And it just spreads from there.

**Male respondent:** I saw David Copperfield do some things too.

**Male respondent:** I saw that one guy, Criss Angel, walk through a casino vault.

**Male respondent:** Maybe he could be our new God.

**(0:45:46.3) YOU THINK HE DID EXIST?**

**Male respondent:** Somebody.

**Male respondent:** It's very well possible.

**Male respondent:** Could have been more than one. Jesus the second, Jesus the third . . . like George Foreman. *(Laughter.) The Matrix, (0:46:05.0 unclear).*

**(0:46:08.5) WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE AND NOT BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS?**

**Male respondent:** He was only a guy. I don't know, I didn't say anything before, but Jesus as a whole is just completely unknown to me. I don't know. I would never doubt that he existed. I wouldn't feel strongly one way or the other, but I think that a lot of the things that the Bible says that he did, just like a lot of the other things the Bible says are not literal. It's probably a message for those that are reading it to—

**Male respondent:** Open for interpretation?

**Male respondent:** Yes, exactly. It's open to interpretation for— and there's a message there for people to live their lives well, or whatever. I don't think any of it as actually literal. As far as Jesus goes, I don't really know. I think just the whole thing is unknown to me.

**(0:47:17.3) WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE WHEN PEOPLE SAY HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD?**

**Male respondent:** My response is staying silent. I have no idea. I would say I'm skeptical. But I'm skeptical about a lot. I just try to stay out of it because I want to say, like John said, religion is one of those things that are taboo to speak about. I don't even think as much sex. You're not supposed to—it's not professional talking about sex at work, but surely religion and politics are the two things that make otherwise normal and very smart people crazy. I just try to stay out of it.

**Josh:** I think that there's some people that I am totally comfortable talking about this stuff to, probably a lot of people. But if a stranger comes up to me and wants to talk about how Jesus came back from the dead, I probably would think that, "I'm not going to be able to have a logical conversation about this because you already must have a very strong belief in something that I find difficult to imagine. I don't want to talk you out of your strong belief because it works for you, but if you tell me anybody else came back from the dead, I'm going to be highly skeptical."

**Male respondent:** Like John said—I'm not being close to being as knowledgeable about this as you are, but the movie that you're talking about with all the different stories from different religions and all that that have the same kind of virgin birth and December 25th and all that—I saw *Religulous*, the Bill Maher movie. *(Several respondents agreed.)* They talk about the same kind of things where this religion, this happened, but it also happened before, on this. And this happened, also happened in this other religion here. Another thing that I feel, if I were to do a lot of digging into this, I think I'd probably be more skeptical than I even am now. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** It's like the Immaculate Conception of Jesus. If you do some research you find the same thing happened with Buddha five-hundred-something years earlier. Strangely enough, a lot of the core teachings of Buddhism just happen to be a lot of the core teachings of Christianity that followed it by several hundred years. It's just what you were saying with the movie, and what you were just reiterating is a lot of these different religions have the same structures, the same beliefs, the same miracles that supposedly happened.

**(0:50:01.3) DOES THAT MEAN THAT THEY DID HAPPEN, OR DOES IT MEAN THE STORY IS BEING CO  
OPTED?**

**Male respondent:** It gives it some plausibility, but it also gives the skeptics a lot of ammunition as well. Christianity, Jesus, God is the one true God. But there's a lot of religions that think their god is the one true God. Wouldn't a man be saved by his own God? Jesus, or God as we know him, Allah, Yahweh, they're just different names for the same Almighty being.

**(0:50:42.6) WHAT ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY DO YOU FIND LESS ACCEPTABLE?**

**Male respondent:** When I first started having a hard time with some Christianity stuff was the idea that if you're not saved as a Christian person, you go to hell. That's a lot of the world is going to hell. Just thinking about babies and people in countries where they don't have such a thing as Christianity, they're all just going to hell.

**Male respondent:** It's threats. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Patrick:** I'll back that up and say we consider the Mormon religion a Christian religion, the post death baptizing of people who—

**Male respondent:** I always just thought (0:51:28.4 *unclear/multiple speakers*)—

**Male respondent:** Like Anne Frank. They were trying to make Anne Frank—a bunch of Holocaust victims, the LDS church by (0:51:35.4 *unclear/multiple speakers*)—

**(0:51:37.4) I HEARD THAT.**

**Patrick:** Yes? Oh, yes. My grandmother was a staunch German Catholic was baptized post death by the Mormon Church, with no consent or no anything.

**Male respondent:** That's wrong.

**(0:51:49.9) ANY OTHER THINGS YOU FIND OBJECTIONABLE?**

**Male respondent:** It seems, I think in general, that the going to hell, telling somebody that they're going to hell and that their relatives that are already deceased are in hell permanently, that's pretty objectionable. It's happened many times to me, to family members.

**(0:52:26.3) WHY IS IT OBJECTIONABLE?**

**Male respondent:** It makes you angry and sad and really pushes you away.

**Male respondent:** I could just elaborate on that. Speaking above your pay grade, so to speak. I had the same thing. I had a cousin, friend, who committed suicide. God love her, she said straight to the family, "A shame he's not going to get to be with God in heaven." And it was just like, "You're going to tell a grieving family who just lost a brother, a son, that he's now burning in the fires of hell? Boy, way to be a good, consoling Christian."

**Male respondent:** Well the joke's on them, because if the Bible is true, he was already with God.

**Male respondent:** That's like the Westboro Baptist Church. (*Several respondents agreed.*) They actually picket people's funerals. (*One respondent agreed.*)

**Male respondent:** Military. Those guys are all going to go to hell, if there is a hell. They're taking Christianity and they're twisting it for their own agendas.

**(0:53:33.7) IS THAT A TYPICAL THING THAT CHRISTIANITY DOES?**

**Male respondent:** It's so bad that there's other people rising up to block them, take down their websites. (*Several respondents agreed.*)

**Male respondent:** They're an outlier, for sure.

**Male respondent:** I don't understand what their goal is. (*One respondent agreed.*)



**Male respondent:** They just create more and more enemies for themselves (0:53:54.7 unclear).

**Male respondent:** I think the homosexuality thing.

**(0:53:59.7) TELL ME ABOUT THAT.**

**Male respondent:** I think they're pretty intolerant of homosexuality.

**Male respondent:** I think it goes along with the hell.

**Male respondent:** I think the overarching issue is judgment. They feel that they have the authority and the right to judge other people.

**Male respondent:** When the basic belief of Christianity is that you're not supposed to judge your fellow man. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(0:54:24.6) WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF "JUDGMENT"?**

**Male respondent:** Saying somebody is going to go to hell because they don't believe as strong as the other person, or because they did something that's a sin. The basic pretext of Christianity is supposed to be tolerant, compassionate, loving, forgiving, merciful. But there's a lot of examples in the Bible where biblical figures, they pass judgment on their fellow man. They demonstrate hatred for their fellow man and most definitely not very compassionate.

**Male respondent:** You could hit all the hot buttons there; abortions, homosexuality, everything really. It boils down to judgment.

**(0:55:25.1) IF THEY ARE INTOLERANT OF AND JUDGE HOMOSEXUALITY, WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?**

**Male respondent:** You're making a human being feel less than human.

**(0:55:53.1) WHY IS THAT A PROBLEM?**

**Male respondent:** The example of being intolerant towards a gay person, sometimes that's hiding their own insecurities. We're all old enough to think back to high school, think about the guys in high school that were so against the faggots. Surprise, some of them have come out on Facebook in the last ten years. It's hysterical. Some of the guys at my high school that were the most homophobic people in the whole school, what do you know? I see them on Facebook and they came out of the closet. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(0:56:33.3) THEY WERE HIDING THEIR OWN INSECURITIES?**

**Male respondent:** By poking fun at others.

**(0:56:39.2) WHAT IS THAT AN EXPRESSION OF?**

**Male respondent:** Using religion as a crutch again.

**Male respondent:** I see it like the celibacy thing. Some people can't get married and all. It's like they're trying to restrain people. What people want.

**(0:56:53.3) WHY DO PEOPLE DO THAT?**

**Male respondent:** They want to control people, I think.

**(0:56:56.7) IS THAT THE GOAL?**

**Male respondent:** I think it's partly fear. They're afraid of not having power.

**(0:57:07.5) THEY CONTROL BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO BE WITHOUT POWER?**

**Male respondent:** Trying to hold people to a standard that's impossible.

**Male respondent:** Yes, conformity.

**Male respondent:** How can you—priests, girlfriends, or whatever it is—they're supposed to be celibate.

**Male respondent:** Yes, they don't get married to a woman, so they bang an altar boy. Go figure.

**Male respondent:** And they're supposed to give advice to people on their marriages and their life, but they have no experience at all with anything like that.

**Male respondent:** Yes, they're supposed to be the shining beacon of the living Word of God and what do you know? They're raping young boys.

**(0:57:45.9) THAT'S AN EXPRESSION OF HYPOCRISY.**

**Male respondent:** Right. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** But the constraints and conformity that the church places on these people . . . you can only restrain someone for so long in terms of limiting what they can do, and what they can't do.

**(0:58:12.5) CHRISTIANS INFLUENCING POLITICAL AGENDAS, WHAT IS OKAY AND WHAT IS NOT?**

**Male respondent:** Slightly off that topic, but as far as Christianity in politics, I don't know about political agendas. Let's say you have two people running for mayor or governor or president. One of them goes to church every Sunday and the other one says he's never been to church in his life, or perhaps even worse, says he's a Satanist. Who's going to win the election? The Christian, because he's relatable. A lot of people relate to that, and a lot of the Christians will believe the other one is evil; the example of somebody who just never went to church. "Maybe they're evil" is what a lot of the Christians will think. That goes full circle back to intolerance.

**Male respondent:** If you look at American currency, it says "In God We Trust." If somebody doesn't believe in God, they're not going to win anything.

**Male respondent:** “In God We Trust. All of us pay cash.” *(Laughter.)*

**(0:59:53.2) IF CHRISTIANS ARE THE MAJORITY—**

**Male respondent:** Well, they are the majority in this country and in Europe.

**(1:00:10.3) OF THE TWO “RUNNING FOR MAYOR,” THE CHRISTIANS WOULD VOTE FOR THE CHRISTIAN TYPE?**

**Male respondent:** Yes, the family man will get the job.

**(1:00:25.4) IF ONE GUY ABUSES ANIMALS AND ONE DOESN'T, THAT'S ALSO AN EXPRESSION OF EVIL.**

**Male respondent:** I wasn't completely sure myself. It popped in my head.

**Male respondent:** I see what you're saying. I think it's a little extreme almost to be—whether it's a Christian man running against a Satanist, evil, puppy-killing machine. But I think generally, in a lot of elections, especially in certain places in this country, if there is someone that is a very outspoken Christian, always talks about going to church and how his family goes to church every week, or whatever. Then there's someone that even just shies away from talking about that, doesn't ever talk about religion, doesn't ever talk about God. Doesn't ever talk about going to church. I think a lot of people in this country will all gravitate towards the one because, “Oh, he's a God-loving man. He's a family man. He's a churchgoer. That's the kind of person that we want to stand by.”

**(1:01:37.5) WHY?**

**Male respondent:** It's a bit of a misconception. *(One respondent agreed.)* There's a misconception that because you go to church, you have these moral values, these—

**Male respondent:** It's a big misconception.

**Male respondent:** That you're this beacon of morality and you love God, and that sort of thing. Whereas if you don't go to church and you don't express any sort of religion or Christianity or anything like that, that you don't have morals, you don't have those values. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** I think with the religion and politics thing, I think it's gone as far as that there's churches out there that are telling their congregations how they should be voting. *(One respondent agreed.)* To me, I have a real hard time with that.

**Male respondent:** They push their agenda. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** We should go back to the presidential election.

**Male respondent:** Right, Obama.

**Male respondent:** Just the speculation that he was a Muslim had people freaked out that we were going to be under Sharia Law. They were *(1:02:36.0 unclear/multiple speakers)* the Middle East. *(One respondent agreed.)* You have Mitt Romney . . . I don't want to get political, but good Christian guy, buys, flips companies, lays tons of people off, cancels health insurance, yada yada yada.

**(1:02:50.3) (1:02:50.3 UNCLEAR/LOW VOLUME RESPONSE) OBAMA.**

**Male respondent:** He is.

**(1:02:51.9) A CHRISTIAN?**

**Male respondent:** *(1:02:53.3 Unclear/multiple speakers).*

**Male respondent:** I think he would call himself a Christian.

**(1:02:56.6) KEEP GOING.**

**Male respondent:** That was the whole idea, just that you could speculate that a guy was Muslim would be enough to get people nervous.

**Male respondent:** A lot of times on the news on certain channels they would make sure to call him by his first, middle, and last name, because they know that is accurate, it's not taking a shot at calling him a Muslim, but they thought the American public, they more they heard Barack Hussein Obama, the more they would gravitate away from him, thinking the Muslim ties, or whatever.

**Male respondent:** Fox News did that a lot.

**(1:03:35.2) WERE THEY PUSHING A CHRISTIAN AGENDA OR PREYING UPON POST 9/11 FEARS?**

**Male respondent:** Both. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** Conservative agenda.

**Male respondent:** Because the people who attacked America weren't Christians; they were Muslims.

**Male respondent:** It goes back to the Crusades, right? Muslims and Christians, right?

**Male respondent:** The irony is, some of my friends that are Muslim, they seem to be more tolerant of other world religions than the Christian friends I've got. Go figure. Their religion has a bad rap because of a few rotten apples.

**Male respondent:** But it's like that with every religion. *(One respondent agreed.)* Like I was saying earlier how there are people in general, there are stupid members of every religion and then there are people that are smart in every religion.

**Male respondent:** If the Westboro Baptists were the spokespersons for the Christian religion *(1:04:24.2 unclear/multiple speakers)*—

**Male respondent:** They're the white trash of Christianity. *(Laughter.)*

**Male respondent:** We'd have a completely different outlook on that, but fortunately they're not.

**Male respondent:** I also think that in other parts of the world you might say all of these things about another religion who is the majority. We associate judging and things like that with the majority here, but I think that other places—there's some effect when you're the majority that you expect society to skew more toward your views.

**(1:05:01.2) THAT COULD BE SAID OF SOME OF THE FAR EAST COUNTRIES—**

**Male respondent:** The Far East.

**(1:05:06.0) MUSLIM OR HINDUISM.**

**Male respondent:** Yes. Maybe a Christian in Israel would not be very happy with the things that are there, who knows?

**(1:05:19.0) A JEWISH PERSON MIGHT. IS ANYONE HERE—**

**Male respondent:** I am. My dad is Catholic, my mom is Jewish.

**(1:05:36.1) IT MIXES TOGETHER.**

**Male respondent:** I think probably in Israel there are Muslims that think that Jews, as the majority there, are too judgy.

**(1:05:52.7) THAT WOULD MAKE MORE SENSE.**

**Male respondent:** Right.

**(1:05:59.3) IS GOING TO HELL A CHRISTIAN TENET?**

**Male respondent:** Yes.

**Male respondent:** It's something all religions are big on, someplace that bad people go.

**Male respondent:** Do any religions not believe in hell?

**Male respondent:** I don't think Jews believe in hell.

**Male respondent:** Hinduism?

**Male respondent:** Buddhism doesn't. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** *(1:06:20.4 Unclear/multiple speakers).*

**Male respondent:** I think it depends on which denomination because some *(one respondent agreed)* because some parts of Christianity—

**Male respondent:** You've got *(1:06:23.1 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

**Male respondent:** *(1:06:25.6 Unclear/multiple speakers)* reincarnation.

**(1:06:25.6) SAY THAT AGAIN.**

**John:** Sorry. I just did. Buddhism, there's a reincarnation. There's a good and bad reincarnation. You can become either a bug or a horse, or something. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** *(1:06:39.3 Unclear/multiple speakers)* passing out the karma.

**John:** Right, exactly, but it's not to the extreme of hell.

**(1:06:49.0-1:07:21.5) IS ABORTION AND CELIBACY TO DO WITH CONTROL?**

**Male respondent:** It's control. Power. It's limiting. They're saying that priests have to be celibate to worship God.

**Male respondent:** I don't meant to interrupt, but it might also be along the lines of why *(1:07:37.2 unclear)* the priest to be celibate, to make him have a pure life and not be too wrapped up in worldly things. Not too wrapped up in doing things to feel good. It might be part of that and part of control.

**Male respondent:** It's population control for sure. Same with abortion.

**Male respondent:** I think the relation that that is supposed to be used to make babies. It's not supposed to be used as a pastime. If you look at it, that's what it's intent is for, not just for something to do or for pleasure. That's it.

**(1:08:12.6) PROCREATION. ANY OTHER ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU DISLIKE?**

**Male respondent:** Again, for me it's not Christianity; it's just some of the people.

**(1:08:34.4) THE CHRISTIANS?**

**Male respondent:** Yes. I don't think there's anything about Christianity other than some of the things we've talked about that really gets to me. It's just more the people that are so in your face and pushy and judgmental.

**(1:08:50.7-1:09:51.3) HOW DO YOU RECONCILE THEIR JUDGMENT ON YOU AND YOUR JUDGMENT OF THEIR BEHAVIOR?**

*(No response.)*

**(1:09:55.4) WE JUDGE THEM FOR JUDGING US.**

**Male respondent:** Right. I think I want them to see the light and they want me to see the light. I'm like, "Don't you understand that there wasn't—you're controlled" and they're saying the same thing back to me. I can see that on how they want me to believe, "You need to believe in the Lord, you need to go to church." I understand it and I'm quick to back my points and views to change them to, "I want you to see," but I guess I just sit there and take it and just walk away. There's no changing in that one conversation.

**Male respondent:** Yes, for me it's you're arguing about something that is not defended. We don't know what happens to us after we die. *(One respondent agreed.)* We don't know where the world was created from. We don't know how big the universe is. It's like sitting here and having an argument about a stoplight in Beijing: I don't know if it's red or green right now, I don't, so why are we sitting here telling each other that you're going to be cursed to this or that, or you're offending a being that may or may not exist or whatever the case may be. As opposed to saying, "Why can't we just sit here and have a rational, reasonable conversation without becoming absolutist about it?"

**(1:11:33.6) THERE'S ABSOLUTISM.**

**Male respondent:** Right.

**(1:11:36.3) THERE'S RATIONALITY.**

**Male respondent:** Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)*

**(1:11:39.6) PART OF THE CHALLENGE IS THE INTANGIBILITY OF THE TOPIC?**

**Male respondent:** Absolutely.

**(1:11:51.0) DID I CATCH THAT?**

**Male respondent:** Yes, absolutely.

**(1:12:00.1-1:13:07.4) MODERATOR PRESENTS INFORMATION REGARDING EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY AND ONE OF THE FOUR CORE BELIEFS: CONVERSION.)**

**(1:13:07.4) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF CONVERSION?**

**Male respondent:** We're just talking about the born-again part, right?

**Male respondent:** Conversion.

**(1:13:28.8) YES.**

**Josh:** I think of missionaries spreading the good word around the world.

**Todd:** I think my initial thing would just be, "Good for you, let's talk about something else." But then also I would sometimes question people's motivation for being born again. Somebody who is in Africa or

something like that, they're getting born again because they're getting food, you know what I mean? Like school and it's like, "I have to do these things to get in this club and get all these good things." Then maybe someone else, "I want to be with a certain group of people," you know what I mean? Have other people think that they're good.

**(1:14:28.1) YOU'RE SAYING—**

**Todd:** Ulterior motives. I'm just skeptical, so I'm like, "All right, why are you born again, all of a sudden you're fifty-two years old? What's in it for you?"

**Male respondent:** It makes you wonder about the decisions that somebody here brought up about people that are Mormons converting dead people to Mormonism. What motivates that? It's the same motivation for this. You're not dealing with dead people, but it's the same motivation. It's kind of—

**(1:15:13.3) THE MOTIVATION IS WHAT?**

**Male respondent:** I think because your church leaders tell you it's what you should do.

**Male respondent:** It's because (1:15:26.0 unclear/multiple speakers)—

**Male respondent:** I've never (1:15:26.8 unclear/multiple speakers)—

**Male respondent:** Religion (1:15:27.8 unclear/multiple speakers) "We've got these people in our team now." (One respondent agreed.)

**Male respondent:** I've never woken up and said, "I think that I'm going to make these people do this." It's like somebody said, control. It's like, "Somebody told me to do it."

**Male respondent:** What's your question, really, about this?

**(1:15:44.3) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE CONCEPT OF CONVERSION?**

**Male respondent:** You mean for them?

**(1:15:51.4) YES FOR THEM, NOT YOU.**

**Male respondent:** I think this is fine.

**(1:15:55.6-1:16:07.4) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS PARTICULAR CORE BELIEF?**

**Male respondent:** They want to start over and they accept Jesus, lifelong process of it, if that's what—I personally don't, but I don't see anything wrong with it if they do. If they want a false hope, or they need some sort of hope in their life, Santa Claus, to get through, I don't see anything wrong with it if they want to (1:16:33.8 unclear/multiple speakers)—

**(1:16:33.8) YOU SAY IT FEELS LIKE FALSE HOPE AND SOMETHING TO GET THEM THROUGH LIFE?**



**Male respondent:** Right, if they need that. It's not saying, "Go out and kill people."

**Male respondent:** You take this context and put it in a different situation. You could compare it to a midlife crisis. A guy in his forties decides, "Hey, I don't want to be married anymore, I want to go buy a sports car and pick up a twenty-year-old girlfriend." That's a form of conversion. You're reinvigorating your life. You're changing your life around. Maybe you decide that you are sick of sitting on the couch and watching TV and you want to start exercising, you want to change your lifestyle. It's put in a different context in terms of religion, but it's really something normal that people do that is part of the human race. You transform, you change. Whether they don't believe in God at all and they decide one day that God is going to lead them to heaven and they decide to be born again, then it's just a normal part of life.

**Male respondent:** Yes, I agree with both of these things. I don't see anything wrong necessarily. If I wake up tomorrow and see the Virgin Mary in my pancake (*laughter*) and decide that this is something I've been missing out of my life since I've been born and I want to learn the practices of Christianity and all that, conversion is something that's my decision and I'm fine with that. What I don't like is it's saying that they believe that the only way to heaven is by being born again and accepting Jesus Christ. That I don't like, because if I feel that even though there are elements of Christianity that I identify with and I like, but there are elements of Buddhism that I also identify with. So, I don't really think that I belong to any organized religion but I do feel spiritual, I feel a connection to God. When I pass, I want to be with God. I want to be in heaven that I believe in. Having someone tell me, "Oh, no, no, no, you think you're going to have a relationship with God, but unless you're born again and accept Jesus, that's not happening for you." That I don't like.

**Male respondent:** That kind of goes with what I was thinking. The few people I know that have told me that they're born-again Christians, the ones that are born again, there's nothing wrong with them. But in my experience, the ones that are self-proclaimed born-again Christians, those are the Bible thumpers. Those are the ones that are just in your face. When I complain about something going on in my life, their first answer every time, "Go to church." "It's Tuesday. I don't want to wait until Sunday." I have a lot of other hang-ups with that. That's just my experience. A lot of people that proclaim they're born again, their first answer to any problem is to go to church to pray. My sarcastic way of thinking of it is they're Bible thumpers.

**(1:19:48.9-1:20:00.8 MODERATOR PRESENTS AND EXPLAINS ANOTHER CORE BELIEF: THE BIBLE.)**

**(1:20:00.8) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THAT?**

**Male respondent:** It's a good read, but it's been passed down orally from monks to other monks over the years before it was written down. The story has changed. Even in our lifetimes the so-called New International Version Bible is different than the King James Bible, and it's different from the version before it. (*One respondent agreed.*)

**(1:20:26.5) WHAT DOES ALL THAT MEAN?**

**Male respondent:** It basically means that the core beliefs are there but the actual verbiage, the actual lessons, they've been getting interpreted and reinterpreted, possibly misinterpreted over millennia.

**(1:20:42.7) ARE YOU SAYING IT MAY NOT BE SOMETHING YOU WANT TO HAVE OBEDIENCE TO?**

**Male respondent:** The people that are obeying it to the letter of the words, they might not be following what Jesus really said because it's been passed down from so many different people, so many different scholars. The King James Version of the Bible is called that because that was the version that was determined, needed to be the only version of the Bible in that time frame. It's been edited by too many people. So, do we really know what the word of God in the Bible is? We don't; there's no way to know.

**(1:21:23.2) DID YOU WANT TO ADD SOMETHING?**

**Todd:** I was just going to say there's a lot of nonsense in the Bible.

**(1:21:28.0) WHAT NONSENSE?**

**Todd:** I think people pick and choose what they want to follow out of the Bible and that bothers me. They'll swear, "Oh, I only do what it says in the Bible." But they don't do everything it says in the Bible. It's like, Judaism, the Old Testament, there's dietary laws. Christians, they don't follow those dietary laws. They eat bacon and shellfish and all of that kind of stuff.

**Male respondent:** One of the Old Testament characters, Job, he banged his daughters. (*One respondent agreed.*) Incest is allowed, according to the Old Testament of the Bible.

**Male respondent:** They would stone people for certain crimes.

**Male respondent:** In reality that's a bad thing.

**Male respondent:** You know what I mean? It's like, why don't they stone people for certain crimes?

**Male respondent:** They're doing it right now.

**Male respondent:** People just pick and choose and it's real convenient to pick certain things out of context and turn it into an agenda.

**Male respondent:** Someone mentioned that whole umbrella thing, how they protect themselves and you just (1:22:21.3 *unclear/cough*) past and erase that and rewrite it a little differently. That sounds better, let's put it down, okay. Let's pass that down.

**(1:22:28.0) DID THEY DO THAT?**

**Male respondent:** Yes, they could. It's up to the integrity of whoever is running the organization.

**(1:22:34.4) WHICH ORGANIZATION?**

**Male respondent:** Christianity.

**Male respondent:** (1:22:40.0 Unclear/multiple speakers)—

**Male respondent:** If you don't like it, you can make a new church. And you say, "Okay, in this church we can have gay people." That's where it's moving now.

**Male respondent:** That's kind of what the Mormons did. In the Mormon religion, while they are basically Christian, it's not an ancient religion by any means. It's only been around a couple hundred years. They had a problem with the beliefs of the church, mainly the Catholic Church in that era, I would imagine. So, they went and formed their own Christian religion. Now we have Mormons.

**(1:23:12.5-1:23:18.1 MODERATOR PRESENTS AND EXPLAINS ANOTHER CORE BELIEF: ACTION, EXPRESSION OF FAITH THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE.)**

**(1:23:18.1) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?**

**Male respondent:** Canvassing.

**Male respondent:** I'm all for the social justice part. (One respondent agreed.) I don't necessarily know if you have to do it in the name of a church or a figure to be effective. I think you can appeal to, as some of my friends call it, the great Church of Economics. Which just says, it's beneficial for people to be healthy. It's beneficial for people to have a roof over their head. It's economically beneficial for your society, for people to wake up and not feel like they could be killed. I don't need a God or a Jesus to tell me that. That's just simple logic, where we've advanced to.

**(1:24:13.6) THAT'S (1:24:15.1 UNCLEAR). RIGHT?**

**Male respondent:** It falls a little bit into that, yes.

**(1:24:23.6) IT'S THE BASIC NEEDS FOR LIFE?**

**Male respondent:** Right. When you have a fundamentally sound society it tends to work fairly well to everyone's benefit. I'm all about social justice. I was actually thinking about that today, driving around some of the neighborhoods just thinking about urban planning, cleaning up neighborhoods and people who don't get the opportunities because they didn't come from the most economically advantaged backgrounds. Whatever it is. It was just wearing on me today. I don't necessarily think we have to incorporate a religious aspect to that to have it be beneficial.

**(1:25:06.3) YOU DROVE AROUND NEIGHBORHOODS TO DEPRESS YOURSELF FOR TONIGHT?**

**Male respondent:** No, no, no. I was running errands. I was going to find the closest Redbox to return a movie and it just happened to take me east of downtown, which isn't necessarily the best part—it's the barrios of that neighborhood.

**Male respondent:** The telling about Jesus is obnoxious. Truly.

**(1:25:36.1) THE PART THAT HE MENTIONED BEING IN YOUR FACE?**

**Male respondent:** Everyone knows where to go to hear about Jesus. You can get a Bible for free wherever. I don't think you need to tell people about your beliefs.

**Male respondent:** Walk in any direction, you're bound to find a church. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** It's not hard to seek out, if someone wants it. I think just trying to manipulate people and trying to get them to go to your church, you know what I mean? I don't like that.

**Male respondent:** Yes, I think a lot of the Bible is guidelines, like we talked about, to be a good person and have morality and all that good stuff. Action, working for social justice, that's really great. Everyone should do that. Anyone of any religion should be doing that, but I think that should just be in the name of living a good life and doing the things that you should be doing for community and for everybody. When people then say everything is just for Jesus, again, it's just very in your face and unnecessary.

**(1:26:45.4) ARE YOU ASSUMING THAT THEY WOULD BE WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE NAME OF JESUS?**

**Male respondent:** That's what it seems like to me. If I'm working for social justice while telling everybody about Jesus the whole time—keep that to yourself, just keep working with the kids. *(Laughter.)* That's what I think.

**(1:27:07.4-1:27:20.3 MODERATOR PRESENTS AND EXPLAINS THE LAST CORE BELIEF: THE CROSS.)**

**(1:27:20.3) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS?**

**Josh:** I don't know. Maybe to obediently adhere to the Bible out of some guilt for that.

**Male respondent:** What I take from that brings back the mythology side of it, which is the person who is persecuted for their beliefs. It's a very visible and very historically prevalent form of persecution. It also happened to be fairly common, from my understanding of that era.

**(1:28:28.3) CRUCIFIXION?**

**Male respondent:** Yes. So, because that's a very visible, very tangible sign of what, I don't want to call it the apex of the Christ story was, but it kind of is. If you just look at it from a literature standpoint, that's where the chandelier comes crashing down. That's where the orchestra hit happens, is the . . . that's the big—

**Male respondent:** Climax.

**Male respondent:** Climax, thank you. I was thinking denouement, but I'm like, "No. That's the after part." Sorry. I remember a few words from eighth-grade literature.

**Male respondent:** I think of it like a marker. Just a signal that you're in the club.

**Male respondent:** I don't have a problem with the cross or anything. That's the symbol, that's the story, and Christians are sticking to it. That's their symbol, and whatever. If that helps remind them of the sacrifice and all that, that's what they want everyone to be focused on, then cool, that's good. For me, like you said, that's the climax, that's where everyone is focused on, that moment. The Passion of the Christ, it's that whole long scene. But it's weird to me to think a little bit about how such a morbid symbol, a piece of wood that Jesus was nailed to and died on? And that's what everyone is wearing round their neck on necklaces. It's almost like a fashion symbol; that's just crazy. If I was starting a religion now, which I'm not, and it's based on Jesus and all the good things Jesus did for everybody, I don't know, maybe the symbol would be . . . who the heck knows? But just something nicer.

**Male respondent:** A heart or something.

**Male respondent:** Yes, a dove or, I don't know.

**Male respondent:** A rainbow.

**Male respondent:** Yes, something that's nice or good, reminds us about the good things he did, not the brutal way he was murdered. I don't know.

**Male respondent:** I think it's taken on more a positive . . . *(One respondent agreed.)* When you think about it, it is morbid. I don't think a lot of people think about what it comes from.

**Male respondent:** I think when you see the cross with nothing on it, it's supposed to remind you he came back to life, ascended up to heaven, and he's going to come back.

**Male respondent:** I thought it was more or less to remind people that he died for sins *(several respondents agreed)* and that—

**Male respondent:** I also know that the Catholics put the body on the cross. It was all these other Christian religions that have just a cross, not the body.

**(1:31:45.6) NO, THE CATHOLICS PUT THE BODY ON IT.**

**Male respondent:** That's what I'm saying. The Catholics are the ones who do. Catholics are really good about that, don't worry.

**(1:31:56.8) CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN TEXAS, THEY ALL HAVE THE BODY.**

**Male respondent:** Oh, yes.

**Male respondent:** I went to a Lutheran church. The cross that was hanging in the front of the room, it had a body on it, too.

**Male respondent:** I just think that's so strange to look— for someone that's just never grown up in religion, things like that. It's just so strange to see the body and just that expression on his face and the blood. It's just like, "Oh, my God." It's almost something like a haunted house.

**Male respondent:** You take your kids there.

**Male respondent:** Yes.

**Male respondent:** It's probably done that way intentionally to make a point to say, "Look how much he suffered." *(One respondent agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** The gorier the better.

**Male respondent:** Or was persecuted. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(1:32:35.3) PARDON?**

**Male respondent:** The gorier the better. The blood dripping from the ribs on—

**Male respondent:** That's strange for me.

**(1:32:00.3-1:33:52.9) HAVING THIS INFORMATION ON THEIR CORE BELIEFS, WHAT ARE YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS?**

**Male respondent:** Before we got here?

**(1:33:55.8) YOU CAN INCLUDE THIS INFORMATION TOO.**

**Male respondent:** This is kind of going off topic and I'll come back. When during the elections, just to bring it back to the whole politics thing, when they're doing the polling and everything, and it's coming up to the election. They're polling everybody and they say, "Okay, 58 percent of women voted this way. Men voted this way. People making this amount of money voted this way. This percentage of Evangelical Christians voted this way." It was strange that that was a group that they polled just like normal, just like anything else. Did anyone else see that?

**Male respondent:** Yes.

**Male respondent:** But what do I think about Evangelical Christians? Honestly I don't know. I have my own beliefs about religion, a lot of those I'm sharing now, but I try not to talk about religion that much. The opinions I've had on Evangelical Christians is that they would be more of the Bible thumpers, like you said. Those are the more vocal Christians, would be the Evangelical ones. That's basically what I thought coming in here.

**(1:35:16.8) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** I think you have the possibility of skewing to the absolutist side of it. I don't think that, from my experience and what I'm seeing here, there being encouragement to look at other world religions, native traditions, Eastern religions, to get an understanding for what everyone in the world throughout time has been seeking answers for. To me it's a little too dependent on a little too thin slice of what's out there.

**(1:36:08.3) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** I think it's a lot like, somebody mentioned earlier about it being a brand. It's a product basically. Whenever I see them on TV it's just like another infomercial.

**Male respondent:** I think the views align with what I thought. There's a lady at my work that happens to be Evangelical. I had a misconception a couple of years ago that they were extremely in your face. They were very, very vocal about their religion and they would constantly push it on you, but she changed my perception. She does happen to mention church a little bit more than the typical person. She does say, "Oh, we went to church here with—" "I went and did this with my church." Or, "I went to church this weekend." It comes up more often, but she doesn't necessarily push it on me. It's aligned with that. I think it is what it is. You have different extremists. You probably have the people who are Evangelical who do push it on people and try to basically have people believe what they believe. Then you have people who are a little bit more laid back and take it in. Like I said, she mentions church a lot more than any other typical person, but other than that she doesn't push her beliefs on me.

**(1:37:50.5) IF YOU SUBSTITUTE THE WORD "BAR" FOR "CHURCH" YOU COULD BE LISTENING TO A COWORKER WHO IS IN COLLEGE?**

**Male respondent:** Right, right. Yes, it encompasses her life. Everything is centered around the church. I don't know if everything would be centered around a bar.

**(1:38:17.9) IN THE SECOND YEAR OF COLLEGE . . .**

**Male respondent:** Yes.

**(1:38:21.3) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** I'll just be honest and say that I have pretty negative views of Evangelicals. I find them pushy. I think part of this is sales pitch, the spiel, I've heard it before. It always ends with, "You're going to hell," the judgment thing, in my experience. I had a friend that actually got born again and Evangelical and it broke my heart.

**(1:38:53.9) TELL ME.**

**Male respondent:** We just stopped being friends.

**(1:38:56.0) INSTANTLY?**

**Male respondent:** No. He tried to drag me to church with him a couple of times and then eventually I'm like—

**(1:39:02.7) YOU SAID NO?**

**Male respondent:** I just said, "You're nuts. I can't drink the Kool-Aid and join the cult and march off the cliff with all the Evangelical people."

**(1:39:17.6) YOU COULDN'T BE FRIENDS WITH HIM?**

**Male respondent:** No, because he wouldn't shut up about it. If we could have just hung out like we always hung out and watched a baseball game or something like that, then we could have been friends still. But he always had to bring it up. Maybe the lady that he worked with isn't a good Evangelical because I think they're supposed to push it a little harder.

**Male respondent:** I think she's an exception, to be honest with you. *(One respondent agreed.)* Or maybe it's just because we're in a work environment. Maybe that's, it might be. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

**Male respondent:** I think that you're expected to push it a little further in your personal life, if you see an opportunity, stuff like that. We have good friends who are LDS, they're famous for pushing their missions, but we never, ever talk about religion when we get together. Our kids play and we do fun things and stuff together. We've never been invited to their church. I think we went to a carnival thing there once. It was awesome because they never sales pitched us or gave us the Book of Mormon. It was just like, "Hey, if you're a family you'll probably enjoy it. Let's just all go hang out together." And we were just friends, it was a real thing. But with my Evangelical friend, it was younger, when I was at college and stuff. Nothing like that I couldn't even imagining happening with the Evangelical. It would always get to the contract and the bottom line real quick. *(Laughter.)*

**(1:40:34.7) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** I think of a more conservative, outspoken person. The people in my life that I'm good friends with that have found and gotten more into religion later on, I can line up with some of my views and other people here as what they're saying about they see Evangelicals don't recognize themselves as Evangelicals. I'm not sure if I should put that title on them but I think, do some good, but also seem to be wanting to bring things up when nobody's asking for it. Then also I think probably, I imagined the rock concert atmosphere at church with the Evangelicals, at least what I've seen on TV.

**(1:41:47.2) THAT'S NOT GOOD?**

**Male respondent:** No, it's fun for them, but—

**Male respondent:** Is it supposed to be fun?

**Male respondent:** I think it is. *(One respondent agreed.)* I think it has to be fun or else you don't go.

**Male respondent:** To Todd's point, every time he goes to church it's boring. *(One respondent agreed.)* Is that the only way to keep people at church? To entertain, to put on a show, to put on this facade as opposed to be there to worship God and to listen to the Word?

**Male respondent:** That is what a lot of churches have had to do to bring in the younger crowd. *(One respondent agreed.)*

**(1:42:22.8) THAT MAKES IT MORE LIKE A BUSINESS, BUT THAT'S THE CHALLENGE, ISN'T IT?**



*(No response.)*

**(1:42:44.1) WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CONCERN ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY?**

**Male respondent:** It's being forced to share their viewpoints whether you believe it or not.

**(1:43:03.2) ANYONE ELSE?**

**Male respondent:** The connection to politics and political parties.

**(1:43:09.1) WHY?**

**Male respondent:** Because I feel like not everyone's views are being taken into account.

**Male respondent:** I would say not seeking out enough other ideas, perspectives, suggestions, thought processes. Just not stepping back and realizing, like you said, all around the world people throughout time have always tried to seek the same answers, the same questions that you are. Just because you may have one that you think works for you doesn't mean A, that's it, and B, that's how it should be for everyone else.

**Male respondent:** To go along with that, I looked at the last four words on the footnote here, "To be an Evangelical Christian is being alive to God." It implies that if you're not, you're dead to God. There's no middle ground there, there's no gray area. Either you're alive or you're dead.

**(1:44:23.1) WHAT CONCERNS YOU MOST ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY?**

**Male respondent:** Probably just that they are not very understanding or accepting of other belief systems. They're very set in their beliefs and in the fact that their beliefs are the only way to live a real life and to be accepted into heaven and that kind of thing.

**Male respondent:** My biggest concern is in Christians that are absolutes, and everybody else believing that they need to have absolutes as well, just alienating everybody from each other.

**(1:45:22.5) ANYTHING ELSE?**

*(No response.)*

**(1:45:25.6) WHAT SHOULD I HAVE ASKED THAT I DIDN'T?**

**Male respondent:** "How would you like to join our team?" *(Laughter.)*

**(1:45:39.1) I'M A RESEARCHER.**

**Male respondent:** "We've already got your name; don't worry." *(Laughter.)*

**(1:45:48.8) WHAT SHOULD I HAVE ASKED THAT I DIDN'T?**

**Male respondent:** “What would need to happen for us to join a church?” (1:46:03.9 *Unclear*) I had no idea what you were going to ask. I didn’t even know what this was. I figured, someone said they were assembling a group of people that maybe weren’t—

**Male respondent:** Strong.

**Male respondent:** Very strong Christians, but I had no idea what to expect coming into this.

**(1:46:20.9) BUT YOU HAVE A SPIRITUAL NATURE.**

**Male respondent:** Yes.

**(1:46:30.8) ANY SURPRISES?**

**Male respondent:** It was a little bit more focused on Evangelicals than I—I thought it was going to be more based on religion in general rather than Christianity (*one respondent agreed*) or Evangelicalism.

**(1:46:52.8) I GET TO TALK ABOUT EVANGELICALS.**

**Male respondent:** The different cities you go to, do you ask about different—

**(1:46:57.5) I ASK A DIFFERENT WAY EACH TIME.**

**Male respondent:** Makes me wonder. Obviously you can’t tell us, but is this for a church, and are trying to target—

**(1:47:16.9) FOR A BOOK.**

**Male respondent:** For a book?

**(1:47:15.3-1:48:36.6 MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE PURPOSE OF THE DISCUSSION, THANKS RESPONDENTS, AND ENDS THE INTERVIEW.)**

**THANK YOU . . .**