

Christianity Objections & Perceptions Among Un-churched and De-churched

A Qualitative Research Study

June 2013



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Project Overview

Objectives

- **The primary objective of this is to explore attitudes and opinions toward the Christian religion among un-churched, de-churched and nones in four US markets...Austin, Boston, Phoenix and San Francisco.**
 - Un-churched is defined as don't know and never have attended Protestant or Catholic church
 - De-churched defined as formerly attended but no longer attend Protestant or Catholic church.
 - Nones defined as spiritual but not religious
 - Respondents were allowed an infrequent and random visit on holidays or once every few months.
- **Key questions addressed in this research included:**
 - High level perceptions of Christians, Christianity, the Church and Jesus?
 - Beliefs about Jesus and where respondents came to believe as they do?
 - Specific concerns and objections toward Christianity...what elements are less than acceptable?
 - Knowledge of and experiences with Evangelical Christians?
 - Any altered perceptions/beliefs as a result of this discussion?

Methodology

- **8 focused group discussions during May, 2013**
 - 2 groups each in 4 different markets – Austin, Boston, Phoenix and San Francisco
 - One group of women and one group of men in each market
 - The 8 groups involved a total of 68 consumers ages 18-44
 - Per group quotas established for high school vs. college grads and un-churched, de-churched and nones
 - By definition only Protestants and Catholics were classified as churched...members of other religions classified as un-churched.
 - At least half of each group don't belong to a church or don't go more often, because they disagree with some of the beliefs/practices of the church/religion.
 - All respondents attend church less than once a month.



Key Findings



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- General

Initial Reactions To Discussion Topics

Given the audience screened for these groups, it is not surprising that initial reactions and the tone of the discussion were mostly negative toward Christianity, Christians, Church and Jesus.

- *"I have a negative connotation with all of those words. I guess I feel like they might try to recruit me or the place might go up in flames when I walk through the door. I guess judgment and all that." (Female, Austin)*
- **Many recount their individual history growing up as Christians and choosing to leave their parent's religion/beliefs behind as they became adults.**
 - *"I went to church all through my childhood. Sunday school, communion. The whole time, I was uncomfortable with it, but I did it just to please my parents. I always wanted to...I was like, I'm going to get this, I'm going to realize, and I never did. I never believed in it." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"I used to pray all the time when I was a little kid, selfless prayers for other people who really needed and deserved it, and they were never answered, so I'm like, it seems like they're lying to me, because they say God answers your prayers. Hearing all the sexist passages in The Bible, and women can't be priests in Catholicism, and then reading all the corruption throughout history, of especially Catholicism, but a lot of different religions... It just seemed like a big corrupt thing to me, and I felt like, what's credible about it, if all this other stuff is incredible, or not credible?" (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"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 ... and found religion again and found out all these mortal sins. The child was not baptized, basically I'd have to go to a priest and get special permission, 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 do it anymore." The guilt on top of it. 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." (Male, Phoenix)*

Initial Reactions To Discussion Topics

- **Others comment on their current feelings, attitudes and perceptions**

- *“Just disbelief. I guess that's the best way to put it.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Being from Texas I often associate those words with extremists. Though I know that that's not the case I have lots of friends who are Christian and that go to church every Sunday but those words generally tell me the extremist view. Extremists of all religions are terrifying to me. It almost invokes fear in me.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Part of me goes on the defensive because I feel like I have to defend myself.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“My mind tends to jump to the extreme. I think that Christianity fundamentally should be about love, but the first thing that always comes to mind is that my husband has a sister who is an Evangelical Christian with nine kids, who will not let him or me into the house because she's worried that the homosexuality spirit will somehow make its way in and infect her children. I'm completely serious. They're going to catch the gays, I guess.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I think of like The Bible belt, like the South. I don't associate it with the North.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“I sort of think of it as an institution. Kind of like, oppressive is too hard, but an overbearing institution. I think of like restrictive and restriction. That's like the first thing that comes to my mind.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“I have seen it always as something which is much more trivial and not necessary. People who live in countries that are isolated from technology don't learn about certain things and don't know they exist, I feel the same thing about religion. It's unnecessary and if you weren't taught it you wouldn't need it.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“It's hard to criticize the church. You can criticize government and politics all you want but people are scared to criticize the church and religious people. They fear God and so they're scared to question it.” (Male, San Francisco)*



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- Christianity

At its core, these respondents believe “Christianity” is connected to Jesus and his teachings.

- *“Christianity to me is just an overarching religion and group of people that believes in Jesus.” (Female, Austin)*
- **Some feel that Christianity isn’t original or unique in its organization and ideas...but rather a synthesis and restatement of beliefs drawn from previous cultures/religions.**
 - *“I think it's a synthesis for me. A synthesis based on other religions. Because at Cal I took ancient religions of Iran and basically the whole thing about how it started...Not how it started but the source as far as if you go back. The more you read the more you see Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism which was the first one, these are very similar in terms of telling their stories, their myth, and how everything comes down and who has some kind of contact with the supernatural power and becomes all knowing and all good. I think it's a good synthesis of the old religion and how it was refined and changed and called a new thing. Every culture has its mythology. That's ours.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“It was interesting what you were saying because the old testament, basically they took the Torah, and they rearranged it.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“Immaculate conception. That all is stolen from all different religions. I think there's many different religions that have virgin births. There are so many different religions where the son of God died for your sins. It's just this one became the main one and so that's the only thing that we can think of, hear it, see it but it's the pattern that's been going on.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“Christianity is a mix of earlier religions. The virgin birth story is an example of an adaptation of earlier cultures.” (Male, Boston)*

- **Some criticize Christians for not knowing the history/origins of their own religion**

- *"How little of the history of their own religion that they know. It's only the here and now, and they don't know the origins, how it's changed over the years, why someone is a Protestant and not a Roman Catholic. There's that sense of ignorance other than what they should believe in. The morals and the values for some are there, they're out there. But they don't know what's gotten them to that point. It's a little bit scary from that point of view." (Male, Boston)*
- *"Being aware of what's happening in their own religion. I run into so many Christians, or I should say I run into so many Roman Catholics that don't even know that the church has changed the definition of what Hell is. It's like, how do you not know what's going on in your own religion? There's also no Limbo anymore...I'm like, where did all the dead babies go? (Laughter.) They don't talk about those things in church." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I had a high school history teacher who basically said, 'Well, believe what you want, but here's the history. This is how it's gotten to the point. This lesson is taken from this old Pagan custom, this is taken from this.' He showed me how it's a conglomerate. Once I started questioning the history of it, all I got was hostility." (Male, Boston)*

- **Most are attracted to the core beliefs of Christianity – love, tolerance, acceptance, forgiveness and The Golden Rule.**
 - *“I think the idea of Christianity is fantastic. Just the basis behind it of do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It's a great basis...the idea of Christianity is a very nice one. It actually follows most religions. They all kind of follow the same line. The word Christianity itself to me is not a negative or fear inducing word. It's a nice idea - if only people would follow it how it's supposed to be followed. (Female, Austin)*
 - *“I think that there is a lot of love and acceptance through Christianity. There's a lot of compassion, a lot of positives, but with that I also think that society puts a lot of conformity around that, things that you need to do.” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“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 rules, it's just it's a way to live your life properly.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“I don't know if there are other religions that have this same aspect of Christianity but it can also be used as really something that's quite freeing. The idea that there is a God that loves everybody unconditionally. This is the part of religion that I always remember being told as a child. Love for other people and love for yourself as being the most important thing and as long as you acknowledge the fact that you've done wrong there is a power up there that's running the whole show that is going to accept you for who you are unconditionally...Those are great concepts.” (Male, San Francisco)*

Christianity

- **Few feel that Christianity today practices those beliefs, however.**

- *"I think when you go into a place that Christianity is the major influence it's not that everyone is super nice and sweet and friendly and living the way that Jesus taught you. I don't think that Jesus really even has that much to do with Christianity now. I think that a lot of times it's judgment...instead of looking inside themselves, they look for authority in the church. I think that it gives people an excuse to be hateful to other people and to feel like they're better than them... And the rules of how they treat women too, it's very overwhelming and I think that's why Christianity almost seems like this dark cloud to me when I hear it." (Female, Austin)*
- *"They're hypocritical. They preach one thing like I'm going to say the principle behind it is supposed to be good and mean forgiveness. That's not what you see most of the time." (Female, Austin)*
- *"When I think of Christianity, and Jesus, and all those things, I think the principles of it are wonderful, but I think the application, that I've come in contact with it, are not in keeping with the original ideas of what Jesus was preaching." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **As a result, most associate a lot of negativity with Christianity.**

- *"I feel like I do see a lot of negativity in Christianity even more than I would see necessarily about Christians. Because Christianity to me I feel like is very stifling and it's not very open and it was almost designed to be a group of people to go against a lot of other types of faiths. I think a lot of times Christianity is just this overarching thing that is almost like something to be scared of because of what the Christian church has done. It's isolated a lot of people how it breeds hate and intolerance and fear. You're teaching children that if you mess up you go to hell." (Female, Austin)*
- *"The concept of Christianity is very oppressive and it pisses me off most days." (Female, Austin)*
- *"It makes me irritated because I feel like... When I think of church, I just think of all these people who are always telling us what we can and cannot do. It just makes me so irritated. That's about it. That's why I'm irritated." (Female, San Francisco)*

Christianity

- **Most recognize Christianity to include a wide range of religions, beliefs and practices.**

- *"It's hard for me to do that without breaking it down further. I've had a lot of great conversations, for instance, with what I would frankly call more cool, laid back Christians, who identify themselves as being very religious, but for example, they have no issue talking openly and plainly with me and my husband. They don't recoil, like "Oh my God, I'm talking to a gay, I might catch the gay." That kind of thing. Then there's the other end of the extreme like that, the people who instantly yell out at my husband and I, "Repent ye sinners!" Something like that. Things like that are a very big turnoff to me. If we're talking about Christianity in general, I hope it's the more calm Christianity." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I think it's broad. I don't have any one subset. I know there's many different branches of Christianity. Different extremes, many different levels in between the extremes. I don't really have one image. There are extreme members that don't acknowledge other people. I think the biggest problem with Christianity is we all assume their extremists because those are the ones who get the face time. (Multiple respondents agree.) That's what you see on Fox News. That's what you see on any news. Or the televangelists, trying to make money." (Male, Boston)*
- *"The vast majority of the people I know would consider themselves Christian...I think mainstream. A very large religious group in society." (Male, Phoenix)*

- **There is some disagreement regarding what religions are Christian and which are not.**

- *"It seems like Catholicism isn't even thought of in that same category. I don't ever remember any of my family referring to themselves as Christians – they would refer to themselves as Catholics. " (Male, Austin)*
- *"I was raised Catholic and so when people ask me religious questions or whatever I tell them I was raised Catholic...But as soon as I got to high school it was peers that were like, 'You're not Christian. You're Catholic...There was a lot of evangelical Christian groups at school. " (Female, Austin)*
- *"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, Phoenix)*
- *"I think of Christianity and Catholicism as totally separate religions at this point. Even though they both follow Jesus, Catholicism is just very different. When I think Christianity, Catholicism is not included in that. ." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"(Jehovah's Witness) It's a form of Christianity...Yes, absolutely. It's a form of a power bigger than yourself that they believe ultimately is the savior...I think Mormons would be in there. I think Catholics, I think Protestants, Lutherans...Baptists...The list is shorter to say the ones that don't fit in. (Two respondents agreed.)...Protestants alone, there are so many denominations (one respondent agreed), like Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, yadda, yadda, yadda...I'm going to say being Jewish or Muslim are the only two that really don't have the same secular beliefs, the small changes...Hindu and Buddhism fit in that space (not Christian...I think the Catholics, Mormons and JW's are probably the strictest of all sets of belief systems." (Female, Phoenix)*

Christianity

- **Many say they are confused by all the different Christian religions and the differences between them.**
 - *"Depending on which church you go to, the rules are different. Which can be confusing. 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." (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *"I was confused about Christianity. How can you have all those different branches." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"It is confusing. I've had conversations and I seek these people out because I enjoy the intellectual conversation. (Laughter.) I'm antagonistic at times. I've had pretty in depth conversations with a Lutheran recently. Like I said, an Evangelical, Episcopalian, Catholics, and it is all so varying as I'm sure any major organized religion has sects as Islam does and different schools. I'm just confused." (Male, San Francisco)*
- **And most don't understand why every Christian religion feels the need to position theirs as the one true faith to the exclusion of all others.**
 - *"In Korea, the Christianity is growing very stronger. And when I was little, my dad's side's family had a very difficult situation where the oldest one became a priest of a church. The second one was a very devoted Catholic. And my dad, who was the third one, who became a Buddhist. So the fourth one didn't have any religion. So every big holiday there was a fight over the religion. It was just crazy. And the oldest one, being a priest as his occupation, he was very, very forceful for the rest of the family to keep up all the traditional holiday things, and we should do certain things, and we should not worship other than Jesus Christ. Things were very ugly and I ended up not talking to him over two decades by now. The entire family kind of broke up just because of his one way, his way, or that's it. So I was growing up watching all these things and it was very difficult to understand how one religion can turn everything upside down, and then break families apart, and never talk to each other, never talk to the relatives. Ever since then I had a sort of negative notion about Christianity. It's just never going to change." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"They all have their opinion. 'If you're not my Christian then you're not right,' in a way." (Female, Phoenix)*

Christianity

- **Christianity is generally described as powerful, wealthy and influential...a big business...with lots of show.**
 - *"It's the oldest, most continuous running business. You pay for everything when you go to a church. But you have to pay for everything. Everything costs something. You always have to give money, you always have to do whatever. It's a business. Look at the big, giant churches they have. Look at the Vatican. Everything there is beautiful." (Male, Boston)*
- **Christianity is associated with big, beautiful and expensive churches...and many respondents question whether this is a good and necessary expenditure.**
 - *"Beautiful, gorgeous churches that I absolutely hated walking into (one respondent agreed) because why the hell does the church need these beautiful churches when they're supposed to be taking care of people? You don't need some gigantic place that costs loads of money when you should be giving that money to people and taking care of your people. I've just always thought of the church as very...a big source of hypocrisy." (Female, Austin)*
- **And many respondents believe that many Christian religions are only interested in extracting maximum income from their followers.**
 - *"One thing that really turns me off from any religion, organized of any kind, is that there's really a push for your money." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"My father, as a child, a Baptist minister he used to tell me was the best salesman in the world to convince people to sell faith and to sell hope and to get them to openly provide their funds. It's almost like guilt-tripping them into it too. If you don't do this we're all going to look down on you. (One respondent agreed.) That's why they pass around that basket at church in front of everybody. Somebody hands you the basket and you pass it away and you get three dirty looks." (Female, Phoenix)*

Christianity

- **Based on their own experiences, many feel that Christianity discourages questions and individual thought in favor of blind acceptance, faith and conformity.**
 - *"A lot of Christianity that I've come across does not seem to be very encouraging. This is the one person who is the authority on the subject. Listen to him or her, do not question him or her, and if you dissent, then you're evil. I feel that it's generalized." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"I was raised Catholic, I went to CCD. And around the time that I was going to CCD you start asking questions. And we wouldn't get good answers. I mean I distinctly remember my priest saying, 'It was your Catholic obligation to learn Latin because everybody in heaven spoke Latin, and if you didn't know it then you wouldn't know what was going on.' And I know my Bible. I knew it, I don't know it so much now. And I was like, 'Well Jesus was from Jerusalem, who the hell taught him Latin?' And he just got mad. He didn't have an answer. He didn't say, 'Oh, that's a very good point. I don't know. Maybe he learned it somewhere.' He just got mad and he told me not to ask questions. And if you tell me not to ask questions I'm going to start asking a lot. And it got to the point where I could raise my hand all class and he would not call on me." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"Conformity. It's the first word that you have with me...Ignorance. Brainwashing. Blind acceptance. Standoffish." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I used to go to Sunday school every week, and I had a friend who... She wasn't raised with any religion so she thought it was dumb, but that's how I'd spend my Sundays. She'd be like, 'Tell me, why is Jesus... In the picture, paintings, does he have fair skin if he was in Israel...' I don't know, whatever. I'd ask in class, and after that my Sunday school teacher called my parents, and they removed me from my class to another class... They just sat me down with my parents and said they thought it might be better if I just didn't come back." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"She believes that with all her heart, because if someone in an authority position, Christian authority, tells her, she believes it. She will listen to the radio and send money for holy water, for miracles for her family, or to a preacher that is... She's not a stupid woman, she's an intelligent woman who I really love, but her faith tells her to be obedient and not ask questions, and that scares me." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"Not being able to evolve is a problem. But that's why there's other religions. That's how they came to be, because of questioning. They created something else." (Male, Boston)*

- **They believe that Christian religions generally play on fear of death, the unknown/unexplainable and hell as their key levers in attracting and keeping members**
 - *"Them putting fear into people, and not necessarily like an, "Oh my gosh I am afraid" kind of a fear. More like you were talking about. if you don't do X, Y and Z you're not going to go to the Pearly Gates kind of thing. They have you in this box of restrictions and your conformity, but in a greater effort to save your ass. Everyone fears death, right, the unknown? That's one commonality we all have is we're all going to die and we don't know what to expect. In an effort to manage that fear Christianity and religion as a whole has put together some sort of list of rules to give you that hope. At the same time they literally put the fear of God into you." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"That's exactly what I was thinking was fear. As she said, it just... Fear and hope. So many people have to have something to believe in because they're fearful of the future, of the unknown. Then they want something to hope for too and when you say, "Christianity" they need to have hope for the future or fear of the future so they bring in their religions as something to look forward to or something to be hopeful for. I don't know exactly how to explain it, but it was the same type concept as what she was saying. Fear or hope for the unknown." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I think it's a survival thing too. (One respondent agreed.) Fear of dying. And then being nothing. You want to believe that there's something else. That there's something else after this, yes. Exactly." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"Being a gay Male also, and not agreeing with a whole lot of the things that people do in the name of faith, why wouldn't you be scared? To me, people believe in God because they have something to fear and the fear is what drives them to obey." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"When we grew up in Christianity they teach blasphemy is the one thing that will send you to hell. You say there's no God so you're scared to take it to that level. I'm not really a believer but I'm not going to go that far because I don't want to go to hell. Then finally I got a little older and started thinking for myself and just realized that I don't believe in any of this anymore. But it took a long while to get over that hump because you're like, "I don't know if I want to go that far because who am I screwing around with here if I'm wrong. It's a pretty severe mechanism. (One respondent agreed.) That's what I mean. The threat of hell to a child (laughter) (one respondent agreed) is pretty severe. That's a really good way to get people to not do certain things. I think that's why it was created. (One respondent agreed.)" (Male, San Francisco)*

Christianity

- **These respondents favor private and personal forms of spirituality to the public community they see in Christianity.**
 - *"I think of community, because the way that I see it is it's people desperately wanting to belong to something and have a sense of community." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I was raised Catholic by my parents, who were also raised Catholic, and now I don't really have a religious affiliation. I took a history class in high school, and Catholicism seemed really sexism, and then all religion just seemed corrupt to me in general, and just a way to control people. Now I believe in a higher spirituality, but I don't believe any religion is necessarily right." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"I do believe in energy, and I think it's okay to not know everything that happens. I'm comfortable not knowing what happens when we die, that sort of thing. That's my stance. I guess I'm agnostic." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"Growing up, I didn't have any religion, but I found out about Mormonism when I was twelve, around there, and then I got baptized into that. Then I didn't really like that, so I got out and found other religion, like Baptist, other things. Except maybe Catholic, that area. Then, pretty much gone the other way, and went to more spirituality practices. I'm more into that now, like meditation." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"The people I know who are the most spiritual, whatever that term means, tend to move away from Christianity as well, not just Christianity but the organized religions." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"I don't believe that I need them to have a relationship with God. I feel like they feel like they're my broker and I won't be able to talk to God (laughs) without him... You know, I'm not allowed to speak to God unless I go through them, and I think that's wrong. I think I should be able to have my own personal relationship, whether I'm inside church boundaries or not." (Female, Boston)*

Christianity

- **In addition, many who view Christianity as a crutch for its members, don't feel they need this sort of crutch in their lives.**
 - *"A lot of people use it as a crutch. I think. (One respondent agreed.). A lot of people lean on religion, or Christianity to say, 'Well Christianity told me that I can't commit sin, 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, Phoenix)*
 - *"I've basically had an interest in religion and I studied it a lot more or less, but I never felt the need to cling myself to one. I have my beliefs and I don't really believe that an institution can quite tell you how you're supposed to be. It's something that you have to figure out yourself." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I think of the church as encompassing most major religions, and my general thought on it is, it's just a crutch that people feel like they need to get by. It doesn't seem like a necessity in my life, but I see it working for other people. It's just a collective sort of thing. I don't have negative terms because it's such a broad spectrum, but... Institution, I guess." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"It's still a human institution which means there's going to be fallible individuals involved in it. You're going to get corruption. There are some churches that do good and there are some churches that don't. I just don't like it because I feel like it tells people how to think and they don't think for themselves...I just want people to think for themselves." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"It's for people who want a shortcut. They want the answers rather than having to think through the hard questions themselves...They want to be told what to do. (Several respondents agreed.)" (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Many/most condemn the outspoken, extreme and public attempts of some Christian religions to attract new members as off-putting and offensive.**
 - *"I've had many negative experiences with religious people but one of them in particular, and it's very vivid in my mind. When I was about 14 I was walking down the street with my girlfriend holding hands. We stopped and sat down on a curb. We're having a discussion or whatever. I had a really tough upbringing. Some lady came around the corner in a Suburban and was screaming out of her window, 'You're going to hell,' and cursing at us every profanity and got about two inches from us in her Suburban and tried to run me over. F you and you're disgusting and all these things. You're going to hell." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"They talk, talk, talk, talk, and when you try to give your opinion, that you don't believe in God or the Devil or Heaven and Hell, when you talk like that, they get defensive. They don't want you to finish in general. They don't want to hear it, but they want you to hear them. I see that a lot." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"Anxiety because I have respect for all other religions, and I have not always felt that back. The anxiety comes from having pastors, and preachers, and priests, come up to me and tell me that I was going to hell for my beliefs." (Female, San Francisco)*
- **Many/most criticize the high profile role of some Christian religions in politics, shaping legislation and influencing voters.**
 - *"I find myself a little bit frustrated with the incorporation of the politics in Christians." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"When religion becomes more politicized, it drives both sides to the extreme." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"Well, I'm not trying to be sarcastic here, but, honestly, if the church and churches in general paid taxes, I would feel more comfortable with their roles in politics" (Female, Boston)*
 - *"My whole thing is too that it's so involved in the government system and politics. It should be, you know, State and Church are separate, but it's not. It's always involved." (Female, Boston)*

Christianity

- **High profile scandals associated with many Christian leaders during the past several years are regularly cited as examples of hypocrisy, corruption and conspiracy.**
 - *"I think there's a change in demographic where the church has alienated a lot of people, at least in my circle. Because of reasons of scandal. Gay marriage, women priests."*
 - *"Each time you saw a TV evangelist, or what have you, there's another one that had something going on that wasn't supposed to be." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"The other thought about church was just some of the abuse lately too in the churches. Well, not recently, recently, but not that long ago. Like the priests, some of the priests. I mean, it's not the first thing that comes to mind, but it comes to mind. The pedophilia problem. I think of Boston. Being from Boston, it gets there pretty quick." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"I think of scamming and hypocrisy and corruption." (Female, San Francisco)*



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- Church

Initial respondent associations with the term “Church” group into five primary areas:

- **The physical building or place and the community that gathers there**

- *“I think people like church quite a bit because there are very few things in life as an adult, where you have a community.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“When you say ‘church’ I think of a lovely place, the community gets together, and it’s sunny, and you just see your friends on Sunday. And that’s something I never really got to experience. Looking from the outside I kind of thought, “Oh, that must be really nice to have that community.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“I think it’s a building. That’s all it is to me, it’s just a building plain and simple. No different than the building that we’re sitting in right now.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“Christianity is the greater idea and church is the actual structure, the building. It’s where you go and exercise that greater theory or philosophy or whatever.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“When you talk about church and Christianity, Christianity is a belief and the church is the clubhouse that you go to. The church is just the building that holds the place to talk to, to go congregated and talk. Your Christianity is your spiritual belief to maybe how you’re raised or what you believe in. I don’t think that they’re one in the same at all.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“The primary purpose of a church to me seemed to be a social event because if I wanted to have my faith and have my sin forgiven why do I have to go to church to do that?” (Male, Austin)*

- **The good work that some do in time of need.**

- *"Some of the churches are so charitable whether it's out of guilt or pressure or obligation or whatever the bottom line is when I have a family who has an ex-offender parent and I cannot get any shelter to take them in or feed them or do anything, it will be a church at the end of the day that will say, "We'll take them in." (Female, Austin)*

- **The focus on money/wealth...accumulating, distributing and keeping**

- *"I just think about it's to make money. It's just to make money. You were talking about seeing these amazing beautiful churches. I have to say I grew up in a church that's very modest and I still go from time to time when I go home. It's extremely modest and I just think that's wonderful. Organized religion, making money, I just see it as a way of making money and fill other people's pockets. Because I see a whole lot more than just the church I grew up in. You go see Catholic churches and it's shocking. Not just Catholic, it's a bunch of churches." (Female, Austin)*
- *"A business. And dirt floor, that's what I would like it. And 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. I guess I don't want to see money mixed in with religion. I don't know. I see these multi-million dollar churches being built and the cost- Pay for the living for the priest and the nuns and what have you-It's the exact opposite. You think of Jesus- homeless people, the people didn't want and then you've got these pastors with the gold and everything. It really bothers me." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"Sometimes I've gone to church, like a mega church, and feel like, they're trying to shake these people upside down and get every last penny. Or, they're trying to get them to vote a certain way because they have an an agenda." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"I asked them, if you guys care about the needy or if you care about people that are in poverty how come you guys just built this multi-million dollar church. Their answer was, "Well we need a place for people to come and worship." And I said, "I don't understand, you could worship anywhere. You don't have to build a million-dollar church." (Female, Boston)*

- **The hierarchy/organization/institution/administration responsible for leading and decision making.**
 - *"I think that any of these churches, it's a business. It's political. That's all it is to me. (Female, Austin)*
 - *"When you say 'The Church' I have some very negative connotations. I think of creepy old white men in their, what is the word, like cults. And then the things that they have done and how they brainwash people." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"When I hear the church I think of that faceless bureaucracy that's just out manipulating their message in a way to attract as most minds as possible and generate as much money from poor people's pockets as they possibly can. It means more money. It means more power, more political power, more influence on the world." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"Church brings it to that realm of bureaucracy." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"Church is more the experience of going to church, and what happens there, and "the church" is the institution of it, and the politics behind it, and the higher-up people behind it." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"I think there's the organizations that are about hierarchy like the Catholic church, the Mormon church, the Scientologists or whatever. There's organizations that are very leadership and hierarchy driven. Then I think there's other Christian organizations or denominations that are less like that. I associate the word "The Church" when you refer to the church as the former where there is a leader and they're giving, deciding things. Then there's more of a grassroots church which is community based I guess." (Male, San Francisco)*

- **The scandals of recent years and efforts to cover them up.**

- *"No one mentioned the pedophilia yet...there was a whole horrifying other side." (Female, Austin)*
- *"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." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"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. They will protect their own to the death." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"When I was growing up if there was an issue of domestic violence or even abuse of children or even sexual abuse or whatever, it was something that we deal with within the church. Don't even go to the authorities. First come here and let's try to counsel." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I associate it more with the Catholic church. I don't know, when the pope stepped down, everyone was saying they feel bad for the pope, and I was like, 'I hate the pope.' He knows about all these children getting molested by these priests – again, repressed people – and not only did they not remove them, they just reassigned them somewhere else so they can keep doing it. It's that knowledge, and hiding it from the public, and letting one of the worst things that can happen to you as a person continue, and say that you're a man of God... That's corruption to me. (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"I do think of it more as the crazy stuff that happens inside the church, and comes out later. Not only Catholic churches, but a lot of other churches, the pastors are cheating on their wives, and they're with other women, and it seems like... It falls under being hypocritical, but it just seems like everything is false inside the church." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **If asked about “The Church” instead of “Church”, many think first of Catholicism.**
 - *“Yes, Catholicism is much more of “The Church” than Christianity is outside of just the sense of community and just liking to have that thing to go to and people to meet and talk to and share some sort of similar natures with. But when I think of the church I feel more Catholicism than Christianity.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“I think of Catholicism and know there is the Pope.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“I think of the priest that I had growing up.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“Since I grew up Catholic, I think of “The Church” as the Vatican, but if I just say “church,” it could be anywhere where I’m feeling very spiritual. I could be in a house club or something like that, listening to one of my favorite DJs, and I’ll turn to my friend like, “Oh my God, I feel like I’m in church.” (Female, San Francisco)*
- **Respondents in all groups most often turn to the Catholic Church, Mega-churches and TV religions for their examples of negatives...the biggest/most ostentatious/most expensive buildings, the greatest amount of wealth accumulation and the most powerful/hierarchical/dictatorial/closed-minded/male-dominated leadership.**
 - *“If you look at a lot of the big, mega churches, or if we’re talking about the Catholic churches, they’re very ornate. They’re as big as this building that we’re in right now. They have these great decorations. I think that to me, that’s contradictory to a lot of the messages of Christianity, serving others. I don’t understand how having gorgeous, expensive stained glass windows, and these wonderful decorations in churches that must have cost \$20 million, easy, to build, serve the purpose of religion. Getting people to worship there any better.” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“I think accumulating assets – I think doesn’t the Vatican have the biggest art collection in the world?” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“I went to a mega church, and it was so extravagant. This big building, and giant TV screens, and they probably spent millions of dollars on it. I’m like, why don’t they... It seems really hypocritical. Why aren’t they giving this money to people who need it?” (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Several respondents single out the music as something they like about Church.**

- *"I like the (Southern Baptist) music. It's like a lot of soul music, and they seem really into it" (Female, Boston)*
- *"Go to services at Grace Cathedral. It's an assembly of people just really having so much fun with their religion and the music is spectacular. I'm not sure what denomination it is but they have these great big gospel services. I've been to services there. Everybody goes to see it at least once just for the spectacle. It's this huge cathedral and they have a live band and they have really fun rocking out services." (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"I usually feel a little bit creeped out when I go to church, because I guess they're telling me what to believe, but I really like the singing." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"You know how you said you love the music, that's part of the reason why I go to that church (Southern Baptist) periodically. Because one of my good friends, he's the band director, and he doesn't... I don't know the word. Water down the music. He actually expresses it the way it's meant to be played. Because the service I grew up with, they sing in a very old-timey operatic choir, but he brings the funk. He basically rocks the house. For me, since I have a very strong connection with music to begin with, that's how I connect with the greater universe, or God, or whatever you want to..." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Negative childhood Church experiences appear a key driver of non-practice decisions for these respondents.**
 - *“I was always turned off from an early age. At least the organized part. I understand wanting to have a connection with something that you feel is greater than you, but then to make that identify you and who you're going to interact with and what you're going to feel about somebody else and all that just didn't make sense to me, the organized part.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“I just think about going to Sunday school as a kid. I hated it. I refused to go. I had this phase when I was five, and I was just like, ‘I won't go. I won't go. I hate it so much.’ It just felt silly. I didn't believe it. I thought it was make believe stuff that they were insisting was real but obviously it wasn't. At the same time I still believed in Santa Claus and stuff. This one particular thing I haven't really bought into. I would insist on going in a full Darth Vader costume when they would take me as a little boy. They posted my picture” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“I disliked it for different reasons though. When I was young I didn't know what was going on. I was just following my parents. They make you go to Sunday school. I did a little bit of that. It was because it was boring. It was really boring. They'd try to make the lessons interesting and that kind of thing. I don't know, it never really worked out. It didn't seem to be as enticing as all the other things I wanted to do which were play with friends and play games, that kind of stuff.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“I was raised Catholic. And I went to CCD and I went to church when I was younger, and I didn't feel like I fit in too much. And I was also kind of raised in California, too, back and forth. And my aunt was Christian and my cousins were, so I went with them to just one of their worship services, and I had some questions for the preacher at the time. And so I went to lunch with him and... I'm 14 and I just have random questions. So I was like, “Well what if I just don't believe in the whole story of Jesus? It was translated over, and over, and over again,. What if I just don't believe all of it?” And he pretty much told me that I was going to go to hell anyway, hell in a hand basket, pretty much. So from then on I was just like this, “I don't even believe you. You're just a human being like me and you're telling me what's going to happen to me, and you have no right.” So from then on I was just like, “Nope, no thank you. No thank you very much.” (Female, Boston)*

- **Another is the over-arching feeling among these respondents that Church is the place where Christianity regularly and repeatedly tells its members what they must believe and do to retain membership.**
 - *"It's the building where people with similar interests gather and share their interests. I don't really think of it as very spiritual or anything. It has to be more personal. It's to spread the word and to teach people how to teach people what you think." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"It's like a big entity where you meet and congregate in a group, where they tell you what's the truth and what's not. What to believe, what not to believe." (Female, San Francisco)*
- **Some respondents with wider Church exposures/experiences recognize that their reactions differ depending on the specific Christian religion and the individual(s) organizing and leading the service.**
 - *"I think that a lot of times within the church, how it's practiced, that can be a huge range of things depending on what church you go to and what brand of religion, what subgroup in Christianity that you're talking about. I think because it still is a community run thing that that's why it's so important to know who's actually running it." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"It also had to do with the pastor at the time or the priest I guess, he thought... He was very all loving and love thy neighbor and very generous. He was replaced the year after with a very fire and brimstone guy who was saying if you're only here once... If this is your one time here a year then you're doing it wrong and so I didn't go back after that. That's really the only and major church experience." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"I guess it depends on... For me, it depends on what church I'm attending, because I have been to a Southern Baptist mass before... I don't know if that's the right word, but I've been to their congregation, and that was one of the most fun two hours I've ever experienced. Growing up Catholic, you're supposed to just be quiet and listen to the priest even though you don't understand a word he's saying. They read scriptures out of The Bible and I'm like, "Okay, where's Jonah and the whale? I like that story." But it never comes, and I'm just like, "Okay, I'm going to fool around," and I get in trouble, because my parents are there...? (Female, San Francisco)*

- *"I've had some amazing experiences in a lot of different kinds of churches, because I just like the experience, and even if it's... My mom's mom, growing up, she always went to different churches, so I would go with her. If I was spending the night at her house, we would go, and... I remember going to services where they came in and people brought their pets in, and they were blessed. That was cool. That was nice. Any time I go, and I feel like there's a genuine... Or, the person who's preaching is trying to have a genuine connection with the people, and explain how we have a loving God, and how The Bible, the New Testament, for Christians, how it's meant to make their lives better, and easier, and how God is something you depend on... Not necessarily as a crutch, but as something that can add to your life and make your life fuller. I know when I go to synagogue, it's always relevant. It's not the rabbi having an agenda. There's no political agenda, there is no personal agenda of judging, or saying, "this is right," or, "this is wrong." It's because we move in a cycle, of, we start the Torah at one time, and every three weeks we go to a different parsha, so your year is mapped out for you. You have a different Torah portion, you know what's going to be there, and then you can relate it to what might be going on in people's lives. Those are the times that I've really liked being in any denomination of church. We had a pulpit exchange with a black Southern Baptist church in San Francisco, and I took my daughter, and it was incredible. It was wonderful. I was like, "I want to come here," and the food afterwards was great, and it was joyful. The music was praise music, and the people were passionate about what they had to say, and they were joyful and they were lifted by their faith, not oppressed by it. I really, really appreciate... I don't care what the faith is. When you see that, to me, that's great, and that was a community. When your church is a community, as opposed to a hierarchy... Hierarchy scares the c*** out of me. A community, where people come together and support each other, based in the basic principles... I think that's why I can be drawn to the Russian Orthodox, or Catholicism, or the religions that are unchanged as they have gone through – or Judaism, or whatever – because there isn't that influence of... It's like, "This is what we do, this is the way it is, and however it fits in your life is this business." (Female, San Francisco)*



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- Christians

Respondent reactions to the term “Christians” depends on specific experiences with each individual...all have Christian friends that they enjoy and all have had interactions with Christians they don’t like and try to avoid.

- *“I’ve run into all types of Christians and it really depends on the Christian or the person that you meet. Some of them are extremely nice and are respectful and respect your views and then others are just bats*** crazy. (Laughter.) I’m sorry, it’s true. Others are ridiculous. To me it’s all about the type of person they are. More or less I see it as almost like people belonging to a club.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“People who I know who are Christian who follow that ideology are some of the best people I know.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“There’s all kinds of Christians in this country or even in this city.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“The vocal super right wing is making the rest of the Christians (one respondent agreed) who are not that way look really bad and they don’t like the way that their Christianity is being portrayed. I think that even Christians are leaving Christianity because of this vocal crazy side. There’s plenty of lovely people that just go to church and don’t force anything on anyone.” (Female, Austin)*

Christians

➤ *"There's also specific types of Christians that I find to be a little scarier than the others. I had a friend when I was in elementary school, grade school... Actually, I think it was middle school, it was 6th grade. I got together with her to work on a project for our math class and she decided to start talking to me about religion at 11 years old. Started asking me all these personal questions and said, "Do you believe in God?" I said, "I believe in something, but I don't know that I'd necessarily call it God." She went, "Are you a born again Christian?" I said, "No." She told me, "If you're not born again Christian you're going to hell." At 11 years old telling me that I'm going to hell. Then she sat me down in her living room and made me watch a movie called A Distant Thunder, which is all about people on Earth who are marked with the sign of the beast and they decide to be born again and the ones that didn't were going to hell. These are the movies that as a child she was watching, her parents would put on for her. There's a whole series of them. If you IMDB it it's really, really terrifying." (Female, Phoenix)*

- **In describing those Christians they try to avoid, respondents talk about extremists who:**
 - Want to dominate any conversation involving religion
 - Are totally focused on convincing you that their beliefs are right and yours are wrong
 - Are close-minded to any alternatives
 - Criticize/condemn any religion but theirs
 - Refuse to listen to what you have to say regarding your beliefs, decisions and rationales
 - Get in your face, get loud and pushy...and can't accept agreeing to disagree
 - Won't give up until you convert you or you turn your back on them and walk away

Christians

- *“When you get into people who use it, which is I think maybe you were both talking to, for their own ends. They get so caught up in, “I have to be right and if you don’t agree with me therefore you have to be wrong. If you’re wrong and you won’t agree with me I need to validate my own belief structure and myself as a person by beating you over the head with my beliefs until either you agree with me, or I’ve killed you. One of the two.”...Can’t we just disagree and it be okay?” (Male, Austin)*
- *“Then there’s other people that I’ve encountered that have tried to force the Word down my throat and tell me that I’m going to go to hell.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“We didn’t baptize and my grandmother, who is in her 90s, told me that she’s going to pray for my daughter every day because she’s going to be left in purgatory when she dies, and I’m going to hell.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“Ten thirty five 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 proceeded 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. 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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*

Christians

- **Many believe that the majority of Christians use their religion as a crutch...that they want to be told what to think and how to act...and that they look to their religion to provide this type of leadership.**
 - *"I find myself a little bit frustrated with the incorporation of the politics in Christians and people just following because of their church or of their upbringing or whatever that they identify to their church." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"In my experience, I'm going to call it a crutch. I think that even being religious in your living room, being any kind of Christian is more spiritual in my opinion than gathering at a church. You find that people who have addictions and a weak personality, that are leadable, tend to need a crutch to get them through. They can't stand in their own conviction and their own belief, they need a support system in order to have something to connect." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I think it's just so easy for people to be taught something and just to go along with it and never really question it just because it's easy because no one questions them about it and they don't have time to question themselves about it because they don't really care. I think it's easy for people to be taught one thing growing up and then continue along that path. Not that that's everybody but for me that's how it was until I questioned it for myself." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"I think they really know it's stupid and that they (laughter) shouldn't believe it but they're so scared to not believe it. All of that is just insecurity to me about their own religion. They doubt it. They don't want to admit that they doubt it." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"I reconnected with a girl recently that I had known from middle school or high school...she's just been a reborn again Christian. Just like ideologies have changed. Everything that governed her life was what would God want me to do and I can't do this because The Bible doesn't preach it. It was very frustrating for me because I just want to shake her and be like, "What do you think? What do you want to do?" I don't care what... What do you feel internally? I don't care what this book is telling you to do. What do you actually believe and then go with that. Be true to yourself. Screw this whole other higher power that you think is telling you to do something. I want you to do what you feel is right. That was frustrating." (Male, San Francisco)*

Christians

- **Several feel that Christians have an easy life because they can do anything and be forgiven over and over.**
 - *"That's the other side of that Catholic coin where, 'I do whatever I want, just go and confess and I'm absolved.' (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *"Especially in Catholic church. I went and murdered somebody and then I confessed at church and the priest told me to say ten Hail Mary's and now I'm cool to go to heaven. (Laughter.)" (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"I feel like Christianity suits people's lifestyles in America much more than most religions do. I think it's very accommodating. It's easy to be a Christian. It just lets you get away with so much stuff. Just so much forgiveness it's very casual, the church services. As ritualistic as Catholic churches are... It just feels very easy to be like, 'I'm a Christian. I go to church every once in awhile and say my prayers.'" (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"My mother had a horrible prejudice against Catholic Males that she once told me growing up. She tended to view them as philanderers, and that they could get away with cheating on their wives because they would just go to the church and confess their sins, put \$50 up at the altar, say five Hail Mary's and then voila, they're forgiven. I don't believe that myself, but that was my mother's prejudice that she imparted to me once... That may be one of the biggest differences between the Catholic teachings and the Protestant teachings is that mostly, not all of them, but most of the Protestants don't believe in going and confessing and giving money and you're saved. I feel that most Protestants are a work in progress." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"I understand what you were saying because there is a guy in my school and I find it hilarious, he's gay and he loves to drink and party and smoke pot and all this stuff, and it's funny because he's like 'I went to confession yesterday, and I had to say this many Hail Mary's, and I can do whatever I want for the next month.' So he goes crazy. I always find it really funny. I feel like that's why a lot of Protestant churches have a horrible view of the Catholic church. It's these people, the loudmouths, who put a bad image to religions." (Male, Boston)*

Christians

- **And most of these respondents criticize many Christians they know for not living in accordance with the core beliefs of their own religion - love, tolerance, acceptance, forgiveness and The Golden Rule.**
 - *"All of the religions are based on the same principles of good values and I think that's always a moving and beautiful thing. (Doesn't it affect you that all the religions don't practice that?) Yes, totally." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"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.' Or taking the picture and acting like, 'Oh, man, I'm at church.' To me they're such hypocrites. Every time they take the picture of the church and, 'Had such a great time at study or whatever. To me they sound so foolish.'" (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *"I remember when my parents split when I was younger, eleven, they had a lot of mutual friends in the church. Because my mom initiated the divorce, she was excommunicated from all friends because God doesn't believe in divorce. She lost all of her friends in the church." (Male, San Francisco)*



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- Jesus

Most respondents believe that Jesus was a real person...a good man...perhaps a healer of some sort...but few believe he was the Son of God

- *"If he was an actual person, he seems like a really good dude who just was trying to help people. The church has taken him on as their business prop. But if he was in fact a real person then he seems like a pretty good guy to me and tried to help people." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I do think he was a real person but I don't know that you could say he was messiah." (Female, Austin)*
- *"He was probably this awesome guy and did a lot of good and then it went on from there, like snowballed." (Female, Austin)*
- *"To me Jesus is this guy who lived and then they wanted to create a religion around him and so they changed the end of what they call the old testament, the Torah, and built this new religion. I don't know if Jesus actually approves of it and it's going to be interesting in the world to come when all these people have to face him and he's like, "Yes, I never said any of that and that didn't happen like that. I was Jew so..." (Female, Austin)*
- *"Historically, we know he was there, he was in the Roman census, as with Mary, as with Joseph. They had a son, that's one of the reasons they went to Bethlehem, is the Roman Empire said "Everyone get thee to where you came from, I'm counting everyone in my Roman Empire." He's been distorted. Christianity becomes a white, European religion, and you very well can't say, "Look at this Middle Easterner." Especially as we keep trying to combat Islam. Yes. He was a guy. He was a carpenter. That is in the death register when he was crucified, which was a common form of Romans getting rid of you. They have that record. Those records are fact." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I love Jesus, I think he rocks, but I don't believe he's the son of God. And the biggest reason I don't believe he's the son of God is because his father, in the Old Testament, is a gigantic jerk. And I just can't believe that this guy who's so loving, and forgiving, and accepting of the poor, he never said a bad thing about gay people, prostitutes, whoever, has anything to do with that God. It's like they just grabbed this thing, and grabbed this thing, and meshed it together, and said, "Yes, they're related." No, they're not. They can't be, seriously." (Female, Boston)*
- *"He's a teacher of good messages. He has long hair and a beard. A Jew." (Male, Phoenix)*

- *“Just a fantastic human being. Really amazing like Muhammad. A really fantastic human being. Or like Gandhi...A great person who did a lot and said, “You know what, just because you people are going to be mean to others doesn’t mean I have to be. We are children of God, just as he was a child of God. That we are all imbued with those same kind of abilities to heal with our words, with our actions, as Jesus was. I don’t believe the story of the miracles of turning water to wine. I don’t believe those kinds of things. But I believe that he was somebody who was outstanding, just as we have outstanding people, or that we each have that potential within us. That we are all a part of God, we are part of that universal consciousness that was created by who knows what.” (Female, Boston) “*
- *It’s believable that he existed. That is pretty much the only thing that is believable to me.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“I believe it’s possible that he was a healer. I believe that there are humans right now on this planet that walk that have healing properties to them. (One respondent agreed.) “ (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“Long hair, long beard, white guy with sunburned cheeks...the Son of God.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“Historical figure that somebody made into something they’re not.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“I think it was a smart man like all other prophets.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“Bastard born of Mary. Back in the day you get stoned for adultery. Mary had out of wedlock affairs and got pregnant. I think Jesus might be a real figure in life in history books but the story behind him is fictional. I think he could have been a great individual but I think Mary got knocked up and she made up a whole long story not to get stoned to death because she had sex out of marriage. (One respondent agreed.)” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“I think he was probably a human being who convinced a lot of people that he was the son of God and had a lot of followers and now we have Christianity... I think he was really charismatic.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“I’m willing to believe that he was real. I also believe dinosaurs were real, but I don’t think that there’s any way to know for sure that he was the physical embodiment of God on Earth. We have no way of knowing that. What I can’t believe is, because of what the church is now, they’re so judging of everybody... I can’t believe that the Jesus in The Bible hung out with Mary Magdalene. She was a prostitute. The Jesus that is in The Bible is hard to believe, because it’s not what the church portrays Jesus to be.” (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Others feel it is more likely that he was a mythical figure...perhaps a composite character...and a powerful symbol**
 - *"I recognize the powerful symbol of Jesus. What that represents, we talked about the conduct and the lessons, they're all through him and exactly what he said. Even if you don't believe in it, it's a good example to live up to. Whether or not it's real or not. It is extremely powerful in that respect though." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"When I hear Jesus I think of him as more like an image combined from multiple stories or multiple personalities that existed in around the same period where he did wonderful things for many different people and communities. But as The Bible is established, I think the main character is just a sort of combination of multiple people around that era, and they became known as Jesus. So in that way Jesus is more like a creation of a next generation trying to have some sort of a idol in Christianity to follow. That's my take." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"Honestly, he's a character in a book that brought hope to people many years ago" (Female, Phoenix).*
 - *"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, Phoenix)*
- **And still others don't know and don't really care which of these is true...because they don't feel it makes any difference.**
 - *"It's interesting that I don't know, but I also don't care and it doesn't affect my day-to-day life. It doesn't make me make better choices versus bad choices. Being rational and having common sense helps me with that and then just what my parents told me." (Male, Austin)*

- **Regardless, most of these respondents are supportive of his basic teachings of love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness...and view this message as his greatest contribution to humanity.**
 - *"I don't think it's necessary to believe in the myth of resurrection or even God in order to take his teachings as a philosophy. I don't think it's necessary to believe in supernatural occurrences, just his teachings, not any of the disciples or anything like that, just the basic teachings of Jesus. Which I can't say that I'm even that well versed in, I know the basics. I know the golden rule and I know the turn the other cheek and that kind of thing. I think those things are true and I think those things have been repeated by other people throughout history who either were or were not considered to be prophets of God, or whatever." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"We all want to have a life of meaning and to feel good about the way we spend our time on earth." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"Why can't we just take Jesus teachings as good advice?" He had some good... (Laughter.) (One respondent agreed.) From the interpretation of The Bible he had some good points - treat others as you would want to be treated yourself or there's general... There's some good advice in there." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"I think in The Bible, Jesus' teachings are valid, and they're good moral lessons. I wish that Christians took those things more to heart than some of the literal things from the Old Testament. I don't really have negative association with it that much, it's just... I feel like it's not taken in the right context as it should be." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"I have a more favorable opinion of Jesus than the church. How I see him, as what he preached of, "love your neighbor," and be, basically, a good person... I see that as things you should take to heart, and not take everything else so literally. Those are things that don't change over time. Versus other things in The Bible, they only are relevant to that time period in The Bible." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"I believe that Jesus was... He was a rabbi...and he was trying to tell the people, "Here are the principles. We don't need this. God is in our hearts, and we don't need a building, and we don't need to burn animals, and we don't need any of these things. Our faith is... We can talk directly to God." I personally feel like people got that confused. They got the message and the messenger mixed up. That's my feeling." (Female, San Francisco)*

- *"The point, from my understanding, is the message, right? Jesus wasn't, from my understanding, saying, 'I'm the focus.' What he was saying was, 'Follow my teachings, and you'll have a better life.' That's the gem. For me, whether he performed the miracles, or whether he's the son of God, all that is not important. His message was a wonderful message, and if you muck up that message with your own agenda, or with focusing on the details, you've lost the message. The message is fantastic, and it has a value unto itself." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"I would probably agree with a lot of the Christian teachings of kindness and love, but it's not because I believe in Jesus. It's because I just want to be a good person." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"You're mixing up the message with the messenger. The point of Jesus' life, yes he made the ultimate sacrifice, but did you listen to all the other stuff he said before? Because that stuff was important too, and if you're hung up on him being killed, I think that it can distract from... He was pretty clear about helping the poor, and not judging people, and being of service in your life. He was pretty clear on that. That wasn't a side note, that was the focus. If your focus becomes his torturous death, and how gruesome can you make the body, but how awesome can you make the abs at the same time. It's more than creepy to me. I think it distracts from the beautiful parts of Christianity, which is the life that you can live with it." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Many speak of trying to live their life in accordance with this message**

- *"I decided that it was so manmade, that while there were great truths there things that I wanted to live by, that as a faith that it was too pieced together and not what people thought it was." (Male, Austin)*

- **Few, however, talk about having any sort of personal relationship with Jesus.**

- *"I don't really think about Jesus in any more of a personalized sense." (Male, Austin)*
- *"I think of the word 'Jesus' as a being. I think of it as a feeling. I think of it as a friend. I think of it as a very intimate, close, near you relationship. I've had some seriously religious experiences where I've seen, felt, with my eyes and my body, him next to me. For me it's a very intimate thought." (Female, Phoenix)*

- **Many question/doubt/don't believe several aspects of the "Jesus Story"**

- Virgin birth/Immaculate Conception
- Resurrection from the dead
- Ascension into heaven
- Son of God/Messiah
- Miracles
- Fair-skinned, blue-eyed images

- *"He was built up to be a messiah and he wasn't. He didn't fit the criteria." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I think is that a lot of myth got mixed in there and so it's quite possible that a lot of the miracles and the virgin birth and all of that is myth and a story that got embedded into this church thought." (Female, Austin)*
- *"He was born to save us from our sins. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I mean, who really believes that? It's impossible. I don't buy it." (Male, Boston)*
- *"There's the whole Immaculate Conception thing. I have a hard time believing one day you wake up and you're knocked up. There's a disconnect there for me. Then also the whole resurrection. That's obviously a big faith thing. I do have faith, and Christian leaning faith, but if we're going to talk about what's difficult to believe, and this is where you have to find your faith strings, you've got to be kidding me. This guy died and then he's in a tomb and he's gone? They washed him." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Anything that doesn't physically happen now, that seems not possible...I don't believe in." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **Several feel that The Bible only includes a small part of the “Jesus Story”...and that even that has likely been distorted to fit the writer’s objectives.**
 - *“It all comes back to the organized religion thing because they put together the whole new testament so there's some stories that are kept in and some stories that were kicked out. (One respondent agreed.) I think some of the real history is in there. I just don't think we have all of the story.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“I think I heard or read that at least five percent of what he said is actually in The Bible. I think that he was a positive loving person and there's so much about Jesus' life that isn't in The Bible, just years of his adult life. There's theories that he went to work in Asia and studied Buddhism and started doing these really incredible spiritual things and then brought them back and taught people how to manifest stuff and how to connect with the spirit. I believe that maybe that was even why he was killed. He wasn't killed and it wasn't said that he died for your sins until the Protestant Reformation years after to help popularize Christianity and Catholicism to bring more people in. Having that whole relationship that God is your friend because people were so turned off by Christianity at that point. I think that's where he was whored out by the church. I think that he was alive. I definitely think he existed. I think that he's a spiritual leader but more spiritual like within yourself and then came back and was treated that way. In The Bible there's 26 original gospels. Only four of them got put in The Bible. I think that maybe there's more to that. (Laughter.) They handpicked and selected them to go with the serving creed that they were trying to work for. They were trying to build this brand. (One respondent agreed.) That's something that personally almost hurts my feelings because so many people are missing out on the lessons of purpose, of life, of what Jesus was supposed to do.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“I've heard the Vatican hides sections of The Bible that portray Jesus in a more negative light...” (Female, San Francisco)*

- **And some believe that Jesus himself may be something Christianity borrowed from other religions/cultures.**
 - *“Every culture on the planet from dot on the forehead Indian to Indian Indians, they all have a shared story that I can get on board with, and that’s that somebody came who didn’t belong and made changes and surprised people and said, “I’ll be back.” It’s a pretty basic story through every culture that there is. We can get really basic. It’s not very confusing. We don’t know a lot because we weren’t here, but it’s pretty basic.” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“Every culture has a person that didn’t belong who was there who made an impact and promised to return.” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“I took some Mythology in college, years ago, also watched another movie recently called Zeitgeist that just shows in all religions they all have a virgin birth, of December 25th, the 12 Apostles, arose in death, 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, dies, rose, 12 Apostles. They all had– It’s like, “Alright we’re following this one too to keep us in line.” I don’t know, I don’t want to believe that.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“It’s like the immaculate conception of Jesus, if you do some research you find the same thing happened with Buddha, 500-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.” (Male, Phoenix)*



Key Findings

Feelings, Attitudes and Perceptions

- The Bible

All of these respondents view The Bible is a book of stories and believe that these stories have likely undergone significant changes as they were translated across languages and handed down through time.

- *"We had a youth pastor who basically was very young and hip. And he sat down and the first thing he said to us was, 'The Bible is a book of stories written by men, interpreted by men, and it's just to help us understand our faith.' And so, of course, that got me to think, oh, this is just a book of stories. This isn't necessarily the word of God. And so we all had this very inquisitive group." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Honestly, it blows my mind because you can find direct passages in The Bible contradicting the fact that they're preaching." (Female, Austin)*
- *"It's a fairytale...like a Brothers Grimm book of compilations." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Even if the book was completely right, just the basis of translation between languages leaves room for error. We're here thousands of years after the book was written." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Those stories change and evolve over time. It's like a game of Telephone. What you tell me and I tell her is going to be something different (one respondent agreed) by the time it gets to her. Stretch that out over thousands of years." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"The Bible's been translated, and translated, and retranslated, and given to kings, and they translated it... That's the funny thing growing up in the church. 'This is the word of God.' I'm like, 'Really? Because last time I checked, that was in a different language, that was translated into a different language, that was translated into a different language, and now it's in this form.' How can you really say that is the word of God, when it's gone through..." (Female, San Francisco)*

The Bible

- **None believe The Bible is the Word of God to be taken literally...but rather describe it as the selected writings of a few men who came after Jesus and may not have even known him.**
 - *“The Christian Gospels didn't start getting written down... the first of them didn't get written down until 78 years after the crucifixion, nobody who was actually there is likely to have even written them, what we know.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“The Bible was written by people who can write whatever they want. The Bible and all the different writings are written down by people who created a religion.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“You get taught to believe constantly that man is fallible. Man is fallible. Then man wrote the new testament. But it was God inspired so it's right. Wait, are people fallible or is it right?” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“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 – It's open to interpretation for – and there's a message there for people to live their lives correctly, or whatever. I don't think any of it is actually literal.” (Male, Phoenix)*

The Bible

- **Many of these respondents have read The Bible at least once and have difficulty rallying around it or believing much of what is said...especially in the Old Testament.**
 - *"You can't relate it to current events. It doesn't connect. It's so old and outdated. People still believe that everything that was written in The Bible 2000 years ago is still relevant. I mean, look around you. Nothing else is the same as it was 2000 years ago. I think that's why, again, it goes back to historically why it is what it is. The one I always give is why don't Jews eat pork? Because they lived in the desert, and warm pork gives you trichinosis. So they look at people who were eating what, and they were dying. They're like "Maybe we shouldn't eat this. But we have refrigeration now." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"If you read The Bible, it's like reading a fiction story. I read it and I'm like, "Are you kidding me? People believe? Come on." (Laughs.) To me, I don't want to be judgmental but to me it's just some of things in there I'm like wow, that's... People believe a lot of it actually happened and that's fine. If that's what they want to believe I respect that but to me, my personal belief is all this it crazy to me. (Laughs.) I can't personally believe in that because it doesn't make sense to me." (Female, Austin)*
- **Many, and especially Female respondents, feel The Bible clearly depicts men as superior to women.**
 - *"I think that the overbearing patriarchy of The Bible has inadvertently put women in the position that they're not respected as much and that they don't have as much equality and that expressing themselves with sexuality...Even if you got hit or something, "Well, what did you do to piss them off?" (Female, Austin)*
 - *"Men are always supposed to be above women. Women can't be above a man. I think that's the patriarchy of it, the very basis of... It's basically almost this thing that worships men." (Female, Austin)*



Key Findings

Objections

Objections

Respondents offered a consistent list of reasons why Christianity was not acceptable to them.

- **Some Christian groups are too intolerant**

- *“Evangelists. People who want to save me, or tell me how they’re doing so well because they believe in Jesus. It sounds like you’re saying to me because I don’t believe what you believe, not only am I going to Hell but I’m not going to be as successful while I’m here. It is kind of insulting. (One respondent agreed.)” (Male, Austin)*
- *“My sister thinks Catholics are going to hell. That’s crazy to me. (Laughter.) Believe or hell.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Christian groups think that they are basically the most blessed, the best, and that everyone else is broken. Everyone else needs to be fixed.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“I think the idea that Christianity, the intolerance of it has led to just a lot of destruction.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Most of them, not all of them, are saying, “Nope, it’s only this way. Everyone who is a non-believer is a non-believer. There’s no good non-believer.” I think that usually non-believers are a little bit more open minded, accepting of all religions and accepting of everything. (One respondent agreed.). I’ve had many actual experience where people have asked me where I go to church. I say, “I don’t go to church,” and then they won’t talk to me anymore. I worked in Wisconsin and I had some of the older customers would not talk to me anymore. They would not deal with me. They would not have me serve them anymore.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“It’s not because they’re anti-abortion that I judge. If you’re anti-abortion, we might have a difference of opinion, so be it. But it’s the fact that you’re going to take someone’s life or throw something at them or yell at them. I’m against yelling at people generally for anything. (Laughter.) For buying Cheerios, or McDonalds, whatever. Don’t yell at people. It’s not nice. It’s not so much that they believe these things, it’s what they do with that belief and the actions they take with those beliefs.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“They’re not willing to look at themselves and see their own flaws in themselves, and then try to help people. Their ideas of themselves of, “We’re right, and no one else can tell me otherwise,” and it’s just this stubborn thick headedness that just is completely saturated through all of them.” (Female, Boston)*

Objections

- *"There's a popular Bible verse that goes something along the lines of 'Judge not lest ye be judged.' But as I said in therapy once, I feel like my exposure to people who are a lot more religious, they do so much of the judging that God doesn't need to do any of it. They do all of God's work for him. God doesn't need to do any of the work because they've already done the judging themselves. You have to believe what they believe or..." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I think it's an exclusive club. That's what I always think of. They're very specific with who can, at least, I'm thinking from the Catholic church. So I mean if you are the standard pro-choice, or if you're gay, if you're, I'm trying to think of something else. If you're basically any other religion, you're not really invited to be a part and worship with everyone else. You're kind of, either you should change your ways, or kind of leave, or definitely leave, not kind of. Yes." (Female, Boston)*
- *"The whole idea of, you know, my way or the highway...We're right, you're not. , I feel like they go out and try to conquer specific places in order to put their footing down, and they ruin a lot of peoples' cultural identities by doing that. And then they tear down whatever those people believe in, the structure of their lives, and build massive churches in place of that. I feel like they suck the life out of many cultures that were fine just the way they were, these savages, so to speak." (Female, Boston)*
- *"The inability to accept simple disagreement." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"I went to a Christian university for a little while and one of my classes we had a discussion. It was an ethics class and we had a discussion about how religion affects your ability to be ethical. Basically they said to us that if you're not Christian then you couldn't possibly be ethical or have morals." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Judgment. I'll give you the famous example as a gay woman. My mother is the reason that I came out, but she's the same person that tells me I'm going to go to hell, but it's okay if my wife slept on the couch for the last 15 years, it would've been a perfectly okay arrangement because we would've had the buddy system going on." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"There's lots of judgment on everything. How much you drink, if you do drugs, if you're a stripper, if you're a prostitute...the way you dress and if you swear...You don't go to church, you don't bring your kids to church, you don't teach them of our religion... For single women living with their boyfriends, you're being judged for that. It's a sin." (Female, Phoenix)*

Objections

- *"Their ability to condemn. Each individual one seems to have the ability to tell you that you're going to hell. Who the hell are they to say? Condemnation, go to hell." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *I have a friend who was raised Jehovah Witness and I think she was 12 or 13 and chose to be baptized in the church because that's all she ever knew. Then when she grew up she had a different life. She became a stripper and drank and smoked and did all these things. Her mother literally is not allowed to talk to her. If she sees her in a store will not approach her, will not come up to her. She cannot acknowledge her daughter, but yet she has another daughter who did the same thing but did not get baptized and she can still talk to her. But because my friend chose at a young age to get baptized her mother cannot speak to her. Once you accept Christ in your heart under the JW umbrella you are now a member, very much like Mormons. Once you get listed in their books you're a member for life. Same with Catholics I believe. The moment that you step outside of that rule book... You're baptizing yourself into the rule book and once you step outside of that rule book you are no longer... You are who you hang out with, so you are excommunicated and you do not come back." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"I used to dress very dark in high school. I wore all black, I had eyeliner. I didn't really do the hair. I wouldn't classify myself as Goth by any means, but my color choice was always black. I figured everything looked good in black. Wearing black and wanting to pierce my ears a bunch of times, half of the Christians that I talked to thought that I was Satanic, which I think is ridiculous...It's so ridiculous to be able to look at somebody and immediately peg who they are just by how they appear. When I would go to church with my friends there would be women that would be pointing me out going, "I think that girl's having sex." I maintained my V card until after I graduated high school. It's ridiculous to say you have to look a certain way." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"I think they're pretty intolerant of homosexuality... it goes along with the Hell...I think the overarching issue is judgment. They feel that they have the authority and a right to judge other people—When the basic belief of Christianity is that you're not supposed to judge your fellow man. (One respondent agreed)... 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...You could hit all the hot buttons there: abortions, homosexuality, everything really. It boils down to judgment... And making a human being feel less than human." (Male, Phoenix)*

Objections

- **The Christian religion and I have different views on social issues like abortion and gay marriage**
 - *"There are numerous politician's on record that have said when asked about environmental issues they say, 'It's kind of a problem but Jesus is coming before the end of my lifetime so I don't really care.' It's terrifying that there are people in charge of our country that actually do think that way and believe that." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"The fact that the church seems to, and I don't know exactly what other laws they have, but they seem to have different rules than the rest of society and get treated differently. Like this whole health care thing...and birth control... They shouldn't even be involved. There's one rule for everybody." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"They keep bringing it up (gay marriage). It's like that's not our biggest problem, people...Who cares?... It's no one's business. If you want to believe it believe it but you don't have any say. It doesn't affect you in any way. If you think a gay person is going to go to hell, let them go to hell if they need to. But it has nothing to do with you and it's completely just tearing our country and our society apart that Christianity thinks that it is such a huge part of our country. I hear people say on a regular basis, our country is founded on Christianity. No it wasn't. It was founded on the fact of separation of church and state." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"The anti-gay marriage in general thing, it really seems to be more of an American Christianity thing. (Several respondents agreed.) Not a worldwide Christianity. Now we're getting to are American Christians dumber than the rest of the world? (Laughter.)" It's probably because we have these whackos who want to bring it to the forefront instead of wasting our time on things like the economy or environmental issues or trying to get mental health services, we want to waste our time talking about something that really doesn't affect you. It's just stupid and they're bringing it to the forefront and it doesn't even belong there. They keep pushing it. There are better things to talk about. It's a waste of time. That's not being taught about being respectful. Yes, you're right. My stepmom and dad are Christian. I'm sure they're against gay marriage and all that but it doesn't affect them in any way, shape, or form. (Laughter.) If you love someone you love someone. It's not hurting their religion if a gay couple gets married in any way. It's just their view and they're wanting to push it on and think that everybody needs to think the way they think. It's just frustrating because what they're arguing for is just the same thing that they're arguing against. (One respondent agreed.) They don't want the government to tell them what to do in their church but yet they're going to tell the government what they can do (one respondent agreed) outside of their church. (Two respondents agreed.)" (Female, Austin)*

Objections

- *“Abortions...they hate them...The Christians will stand outside my doctor's office and yell at me even though I'm going for my womanly exam. (Laughter.)” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Right now a huge thing is gay marriage. The church is telling everybody they can't do that, and I feel like it's wrong, and I don't think anybody should tell anybody what they can and cannot do.” (Female, San Francisco)*
- *“Abortion is a big one. Especially when you get into parts of abortion where you know your kid is now going to have Down's Syndrome. (One respondent agreed.) I'm ready to have a kid but now I know my kid is going to have Down's Syndrome so do I abort and wait for the next one? (One respondent agreed.)...there's too many kids being born that shouldn't be born...For me it's not that it concerns me as a tenant of Christianity so much as they want it to be a tenant of my life too and they want to enforce that through our secular government. That bothers me.... I think the people who feel it's their campaign it feels at least from what you see in the news people campaigning against it are largely Christian, at least in the United States...the only place I have the problem is for instance looking at the abortion issue. This person believes in abortion. This person doesn't. If we make it illegal neither of them can get an abortion but if we keep it legal this person could have their abortion and this person cannot have abortions. That's why I have a problem with this person's view and not this person's view. I have a big problem with just people telling other people that you have to do it my way. (One respondent agreed.) I could do it my way even if you got your way but I'm going to make you do it my way. I don't want to even adopt a tone. I don't like the implication that I think that I do personally in my own opinion, yes, I think my way is best. I think most people would say that but I wouldn't go out and try to lure that over somebody. I respect it as a choice, the choice to have faith, because I do believe it's a choice. I don't believe you're born with it. I respect that and I try to treat people with respect for having made that choice. I just don't like that kind of statement.” (Male, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **I don't like how some Christian groups meddle in politics**

- *"Being politically affiliated to the Christian Right and so forth. Well, because if you're going to be in American politics, one of the founding elements of American politics is freedom of religion. Freedom from religion, the separation of church and State. That's true and I believe it's a really valuable part of our system of government. So, it bothers me that there's basically a lobby, a constituency that influences the government on the basis of religion. Influences law on the basis of religion. If you have a group of people that share similar beliefs, okay they're going to vote similar ways, they're going to believe similar things. What bothers me about that? I don't know. I guess it bothers me that there's religion involved in our law making, whatever. Government is supposed to make no law concerning religion, or respecting religion." (Male, Austin)*
- *"Legislating morality... churches don't pay taxes either. They shouldn't be allowed into my government. They shouldn't be making laws with respect to religion either." (Male, Austin)*
- *"They want to teach intelligent design in schools. They want to teach that to kids, intelligent design in schools. Again, your point is well taken. If that's their genuine belief, I understand. But science class should be taught by what the consensus of scientists think. If you've got religious class we're not going to ask you to pull up a consensus of what scientists think in religious class. (One respondent agreed.) I'm not saying people shouldn't have the right to teach their kids what they want. But public schools, can't dilute the scientific consensus. (One respondent agreed.) Maybe you should be allowed to take your kid out of science class if you find it offensive or something." (Male, Austin)*
- *"My grandparents still, they write down whatever the priest says and they go for it. It's scary that you're going to let concepts from thousands of years ago that really... I don't know. All of this is the gathering of so much things and just follow blindly and that's so intertwined with our politics and things." (Male, Austin)*
- *"The one thing that really stood out to me was the whole stem cell research. There is so many things we could do with this. My research is on cancer and we use sometimes stem cells and all of that to engineer cells and do different things with it. Although now I do see they discovered how to turn just normal skin cells into stem cells and use it as a therapeutic way to treat people. If you still take embryonic stem cells, the potential of using it in many, many different ways is tenfold higher. Just because of religion that says as soon as the egg and the sperm get in contact the process starts then that's a living person that stopped the whole thing." (Male, San Francisco)*

Objections

- *"I understand that there's some issues, let's say whether it's abortion is right or wrong. If you think it's wrong you should just cut out– I can't play poker online any more, I can't buy alcohol on Sundays without restrictions. (One respondent agreed.) I can't smoke pot. What I watch on TV gets restricted. I can tell you I attribute it to Christians. I sure as heck don't want a bunch of Christians deciding that level of what I can do in my life. There are some big picture things that we all have to agree whether they are okay or not, but the Christians are going way beyond that, and this gets into the politics, defining what is okay and what's not okay for people to do. I just think that's nuts. Legislating morality. They've gone way beyond what I want a government deciding. I think it's almost entirely, I could be wrong but almost entirely, the Christian influence in government...there's a great marketing machine going on from a political-religious standpoint in this country in terms of trying to push agendas. I think the '60s, the '70's and '80's the three demons were homosexuality, abortion and communism." (Male, Austin)*
- *"it's supposed to be church and state. Separate. It's supposed to be the ideals of what's better for all people, not just them. They always have to put their two cents in. "Well my Christian blah says this... My religion says this, so I'm not going to vote yes on marijuana." (Female, Boston)*
- *"They will have their preacher preach to them on Sunday and go, "This is what you think." Or, they'll read their Bible and they'll go, "Well, The Bible says that gay people are bad, so I'm not going to vote for equal marriage. They'll just stop right there at that book instead of going out and meeting these people and talking to them and learning about them. I have an aunt who has never met a gay couple before in her life beside what she's made up in her head and she's seen on TV. She's finally met my parent's neighbors. She thinks they're lovely. She thinks it's a real shame that they're still going to Hell, but this is the first time that she's actually even interacted with them, and it's been positive. If she had had that... If she had allowed herself to have that fifty years ago, she might be a different woman. But, the church told her what she needed to believe and she just took that and ran. They stop people from thinking." (Female, Boston)*
- *"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...They push their agenda. (One respondent agreed." (Male, Phoenix))*

Objections

- *"We are a Christian nation I guess and the reason why Christianity plays such an important role in politics is because it's played an important role in the old money in this country and it's mostly Christian, mostly white Christians go to Ivy League universities in D.C. or around the country. I think it's just the way things have gone and I think that's why you can go on television and say president Obama is a Muslim and that's a comment that gets a very strong negative reaction out of people because the White House and politics has been tied up with Christianity for so long that any sort of outside religion coming in is threatening to the people who run the show...Most of the founding fathers were Christian and warned about the dangers of Christianity. (One respondent agreed.)...I think the people in power aren't motivated by religion or by faith. I think they're motivated by power.... The political system here is not actually about faith. It's not about what people believe. It's all about power and money I think. (Two respondents agreed.)...I think that faith plays a really important role in that. There are groups in D.C. that have tons of power and they're specifically pastors and different... I don't know what the exact terminology is. Priests or whatever in Washington, D.C., who do have the ear and the pockets of very influential politicians. (One respondent agreed.)" (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"I do have a problem with it. It seems to me like you see a lot of these... My religious friends tell me it's not rank and file Christians, it's the people you see in the media. But either way my perception is that the Christians that you see in the media don't seem to be content living by their spiritual beliefs. They want to pass secular laws to make sure that everybody in the country has to live by their personal spiritual beliefs. This I have a big problem with for reasons like this. (One respondent agreed.)...Separation between church and state just doesn't seem to be honored. (One respondent agreed.)...I think that Christianity's connection with politics is troubling." (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"What if she doesn't have an opinion on it one way or the other, and then she goes to church, and her pastor tells her, or priest tells her, 'This is what you should think on it, this is how you should vote on this.' I think that's a problem...I have actually been in churches where they tell them how to vote. (One respondent agreed.) 'This is what Jesus would want you to vote.'" (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **Many Christians are hypocrites**

- *“They say “Love your neighbor” but if your neighbor is homosexual or something that is not like you, then you should not love them... It’s a very obvious irony. Love your neighbor, but if they are different, you should not love them.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“They are telling me I need to live a certain way, and yet they’re not.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“The inconsistencies and hypocrisies. (One respondent agreed.) Inconsistencies would be if you read The Bible, you’d see passages that conflict with each other. And so, if this was supposed to be the word of God, then that’s a problem. Hypocrisies? Well let’s see. I could think of people who are leaders of churches who are manipulative and doing things against their teachings behind the backs of people. Stealing money or– I don’t know, all kinds of things like that.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“One of the central teachings is to be non-judgmental... what I find is some of the most judgmental people I’ve ever known have been Christians. In the name of Christianity as well...judging everything about a person” (Male, Austin)*
- *“The thing that’s most prominent right now is just the whole hypocrisy; opposition to gay marriage. It’s the number one thing out there as far as Christians making their public statement. That’s just the hot button thing for the past, really in the media, about 10 years, but obviously longer than that. I had a gay uncle. It’s just like, “How can you tell him that you couldn’t be a father, love who he wanted to do.” But then also say accept your neighbor and love your enemies and all that. It’s like, “That’s where you’re going to draw the line and be the most outspoken, is something as stupid as that? You really think that these people just love gay sex so much that they chose that and are willing to put themselves through hell, to do that? Really?” (Male, Austin)*
- *“I’m doing this, I know what I’m doing is completely opposite of what I should be doing, and doing it consistently and regularly to further myself.” Like the leader came out as homosexual and a porn addict, that was a little bit obnoxious. Ted Haggard. He was the President of the American Evangelical Council.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“The Bible says a lot of things that people don’t practice anymore or that today currently the Christian church does not advocate for but yet it’s like this one thing about gay marriage, that’s the one thing that they currently advocate for but they don’t advocate for you’re supposed to stone people if they get divorced or you’re supposed to not... Eating shellfish is a sin. All these other things...They pick and choose.” (Two respondents agreed.)*

Objections

- *"People react to hypocrisy among Christians because they seem to be the ones shouting loudest. (Several respondents agreed.) It's saying one thing and doing another and then also trying to impose their judgment or will upon you. Unfortunately those are the biggest Christian movements, the anti-gay marriage. It's like, 'Our religion is all about forgiveness and tolerance, but these people can't get married because I don't like it and it grosses me out, so divinity is coming back.' They'll just justify it with that every time." (Male, Austin)*
- *"They want to help people. They want to help the Earth, but yet they don't want to take care of the Earth, or believe then, that even if man could be capable of global warming. It doesn't matter if we're responsible or not... Yes. That's the thing. The kind of dichotomy. Take care of the people who are poor, but not really because we still want the money in the church. Take care of the Earth, but not really, because we don't believe in global warming. It will be fine... It's just extremely, extremely hypocritical." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Priests are supposed to be celibate—they don't get married to a woman... And they're supposed to give advice to people on their marriages and their life but they have no experience at all of anything like that. 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—" (Male, Phoenix)*

- **There are lots of religions and I'm not sure only ONE has to be the right way**

- *"If you're Calvinist, I have a really good friend who's Calvinist, and that's one thing she says. She prays for me because I'm not Calvinist. She says, 'Well, you're not going to heaven because you weren't chosen,' or 'That child is not going to heaven because they weren't chosen. Only those of us who are Calvinist are God's chosen people.' ... The Catholics think that we're the only ones going... I'm sorry, I thought the Jews were God's only people (laughs.)" (Female, Boston)*
- *"It bothers me when you try to have a conversation with people who are very religious, and they're only reasoning behind, 'Well, it's my religion.' Which is nice, but that's their only argument for it." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **All people are not created equal in the Christian faith**

- *"He's Jewish, his whole family is Jewish, they all stay Kosher, all these things. He's a really good friend of mine and I was just thinking about it and I was like— one of the reasons The Bible, not The Bible necessarily but religion tells me that he's supposed to go to Hell because he doesn't believe in Jesus. I just don't understand things like – That's just a personal experience of how it's hard for me to reconcile someone who I believe is a good person with the whole religion"* (Male, Austin)
- *"You're supposed to love everyone except for the gays and the unbelievers...people of other religions. (Several respondents agreed). Anyone who doesn't believe what they believe."* (Female, Austin)
- *"Men are always supposed to be above women. Women can't be above a man. I think that's the patriarchy of it, the very basis of... It's basically almost this thing that worships men."* (Female, Austin)
- *"Even now women can get raped and they get cast out because they were raped (one respondent agreed) which is not their fault...it's still looked at as the woman's fault (one respondent agreed) because sexuality in The Bible it's just all put on women. Even if you got raped or if you were treated inappropriately because your body somehow elicits a response from some man that's not any of your fault or any of your responsibility it's still put on you."* (Female, Austin)
- *"Women can't be priests. Women can't be in control of their body, even if it puts their lives at risk."* (Male, Boston)
- *"Since its very conception, people have never been equal in Christianity according to the way it's been preached. It's never been about equality. It's community versus community. To put it in broad terms, the haves and have not's. You don't belong to my community, therefore, you are lesser than I am."* (Male, Boston)
- *"I would take it one step further and say not only is it exclusive, it also excludes women, making it a Male-dominated religion. (One person agrees.) And the way that women are talked to and degraded under the guise of Christianity is unacceptable."* (Female, Boston)
- *"There's a misconception that because you go to church you have these moral values...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, Phoenix)*

Objections

- **I don't share the same beliefs that the Christian faith tells me I should**

- *"One of the passages that people talk about is Sodom and Gomorrah and what happens right after Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt? Lot's out in the wilderness with his two daughters, he rapes them but he's not chastised by God for it. So, apparently homosexuality is evil but raping your daughters is okay. It's like, "Wait a minute, maybe we don't have as good an understanding of this as we think we do." (Male, Austin)*
- *"You talked about gay marriage, but I don't think any of them approve of anybody being gay anyway." (Male, Austin)*
- *"The idea that you can just ask for forgiveness and you can pretty much do whatever you want. (Laughter.)" (Female, Austin)*
- *"The idea of evangelism. (One respondent agreed.) When they come up to you and say, "Hey, have you met my friend named Jesus? Let me tell you. He died for you." (Laughter.) No. There's different sects of religion, of Christianity, that I'm not... I can't remember which one but they believe that they cannot go to heaven unless they are passing their word onto other people." (Female, Austin)*
- *"Premarital sex...divorces...annulments." (Female, Austin)*
- *"No individualization. I feel like there's this cookie cutter mold that Christianity. Certain aspects of it you have to follow. It's your rule book. It's your rules. These are your policies. Different people have different needs, obviously, for individualization." (Male, Boston)*
- *"Unacceptable to be exclusionary on any type of person regardless, regardless of sexual orientation is my biggest problem. Jesus was this loving individual, he didn't exclude people because they're different. He embraced people because they were different. So the fact that the Christian church won't embrace gay marriage or being gay is a deal-breaker for me." (Female, Boston)*
- *"The Pope is infallible. Nobody's infallible." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Confession...that's like the whole brokerage thing. Like I have to tell you and then do 85 Hail Mary's just to walk out there and feel better? No." (Female, Boston)*

Objections

- *"For Catholics specifically, in high school I went to St. Mary's downtown and we, I think it was once a month, had confession. I didn't go because I was a Protestant Christian, not a Catholic Christian. I didn't go down there to confession, but these priests from around the valley would sit on the gym floor and then you'd go and you'd file down there and you'd sit there and tell Father F***o what you've done wrong in life. He's the one, he's your path to God. How is someone who is, as a human, just as sinful as me telling me that, "Okay, daughter of Christ, your sins are forgiven"? I have issues with that. If I want to get forgiven I'll go to the big guy myself." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"There are some churches, some denominations that have become much more open and welcoming to gay and lesbians. There are others that are still very anti. Catholics for instance. There's absolutely zero chance, that's just the way it is. Adventists are that way too, you can't go in as an Adventists. (One respondent agreed.)" (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"There was a funny video going around on Facebook recently where this guy goes up to interview everybody. He's like, "Do you believe gay people are born or taught? Natured or nurtured?" The majority of them are like, "I think it was taught and learned." He said, "It's a conscious decision?" They're like, "Yes." He's like, "At what age did you decide to be straight?" They're all like, "Uh. Well. I don't really remember. I probably can't say." He's like, "Do you think it's the same way for gay people?" They're like, "Yes, probably." Okay, there you go. (One respondent agreed.)" (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"I can't think of Christianity without thinking of one of my aunts who attends a mega church in Illinois, and my two cousins. A couple years ago I was at a family event, and someone was quoting an episode of Seinfeld... I can't remember exactly what the quote was, but it's something along the lines of, "So-and-so's gay," and then he's like, "Not that there's anything wrong with that. My seven-year-old cousin was like, "Yes there is, God hates gay people. It was so shocking and hard to hear such a young person have that kind of hateful view. That's what I think Christians are teaching their kids." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **Christianity is about making money not religion**

- *"I think it's not just politics. It seems to me that an awful lot of the churches, leaders, whatever, are running religion like a business. (One respondent agreed.) Just trying to raise as much money as they can...they're non-profits but they're raising money and using it for political influence...if you go by the teachings of Jesus then I think that that would probably be hypocrisy because there was a lot of teachings against wealth and rich people and greed and stuff. Jesus talked about it was easier for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than a camel pass through the eye of a needle... But Christians are really good at it. Christians are very good at raising money, for sure. (One respondent agreed.) The Catholic church is that way, the Evangelical church is that way. Look at the size of some of the churches and their production value on television and all the kinds of stuff that they have. What are they spending the money on? Why is it not all being given to charity? What's that need for to have the church in a palace? That's bothersome." (Male, Austin)*
- *"Isn't the Roman Catholic Church, like the archdiocese, it's own separate state? So any money that goes into that, it's like, you mean, this whole world could fall apart and they would be the richest people on Earth because that money does not leave that system...I think they already are...Yes, it's like their own separate country almost and anything that goes through there, stays there." (Female, Boston)*
- *"And they all want you to pay taxes to them, they just call it tithing." (Female, Boston)*
- *"The opulence of the church is troubling...The wealth of the church...First of all, it seems to contradict what they're teaching about. Jesus talked about how difficult it was for a rich man to enter heaven so it seems hypocritical. Even nowadays, of course, you hear a lot of talk from religious sources about charity and helping the poor and yet somehow this organization has managed to accumulate more wealth than any other group on earth...You can see. One of the nicest buildings that you see around are churches. Look at the Vatican's priceless art treasures. These are physical things that you can... I'm sure you're getting some people that are distributing but a lot of people don't. If really their interest was in distributing charity how they would wind up with a priceless art collection and all this and the gold and the fancy buildings on big expensive plots of real estate in major cities." (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"It bothers me how powerful and rich they are." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- *"The only thing that bothers me – Amanda touched on it – is the waste of money that I see. My parents go to one of those mega churches, and we recently lost a very close family member, and their church told them that they don't have the funds to hire a grief counselor in the church, but they have all these massive screens, they have a full soft rock band, the whole thing. It's just... If your mission is to help people, then why aren't you actually doing that? It's a smoke-and-mirrors sort of thing." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"They used to sell free passes to people so that their dead family members could go to heaven. If you gave them money they would say, 'Okay, your family member's going to go to heaven now.' Then they said, 'No, we were just lying.' That was a long time ago though...Absolutions or something, they were called. I was trying to remember the name of it. They were absolutions, or something like that. Free passes." (Female, San Francisco)*

- **The Christian faith is not relevant to modern day times**

- *"Religion has the potential to have an awesome community. The fact that nothing seems to be updated really just throws a wrench in the whole thing to a degree." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I honestly do not care. When you're asking how you feel about the raising and the immaculate I don't care. I'd rather focus on feeding the hundreds of hungry kids that come through my door everyday than trying to figure out something that happened however long ago. I guess it is the fear but just to me and I think they get so caught up in these petty tiny little things. Why don't we worry about real problems like world hunger and the fact that we're not going to have any water in 50 years. We might destroy ourselves in the earth. Why don't we talk about that?" (Female, Austin)*
- *"They use all of that as a justification to make it okay for one person or one group to mistreat and/or control another. (Several respondents agreed.) Because of all of this it's okay to make abortion illegal. Because of all of this gay people can't get married. Because of all of this whatever. Back in the day men could beat their women (one respondent agreed) because in The Bible it says the man is the head of the house or whatever whatever. All throughout history it's been a different thing but it's always..." (Female, Austin)*
- *"Without the guilt and imposed rules of the church, people would be more true to themselves, and wouldn't act out or do crazy sexual weird things. Things like that. It goes for priests too, in the Catholic church. I think if they were allowed to sexually express themselves, they probably wouldn't be molesting altar boys." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **The Christian faith looks down on me because of what I believe in**

- *"I don't necessarily believe in abortion, but if you have a sick baby or something like that, or an unhealthy baby, then I think that... Or, if you were raped or something like that, then I feel like you should have the right. I feel like that that should be a choice. But I don't even think that they believe in that, that. You should... I think they believe that if you undergo tests and something is wrong with the baby, like downs syndrome or something, that you should still have the baby and love the baby because it's a child of God. Life's hard enough. I don't think you necessarily have to bring in a sick child to the world if you choose not to. I feel like that's the woman's right. Even if a woman would die giving birth to that child, they still want that child to be born. But they don't want to take care of it after it's born. No way. Even if the woman would die giving birth to that child, they still think, "Well, fine, you're going to go to Heaven though. You're giving birth to that child. Die, then." (Female, Boston)*

- **The key concepts (virgin birth, miracles, resurrection, etc.) are not plausible**

- *"You're born a sinner. (Two respondents agreed.) I hate that concept that we're all a sinner and there's nothing we can do about it." "He was built up to be a messiah and he wasn't. He didn't fit the criteria." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I think is that a lot of myth got mixed in there and so it's quite possible that a lot of the miracles and the virgin birth and all of that is myth and a story that got embedded into this church thought." (Female, Austin)*
- *"He was born to save us from our sins. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I mean, who really believes that? It's impossible. I don't buy it." (Male, Boston)*
- *"There's the whole Immaculate Conception thing. I have a hard time believing one day you wake up and you're knocked up. There's a disconnect there for me. Then also the whole resurrection. That's obviously a big faith thing. I do have faith, and Christian leaning faith, but if we're going to talk about what's difficult to believe, and this is where you have to find your faith strings, you've got to be kidding me. This guy died and then he's in a tomb and he's gone? They washed him." (Female, Phoenix)*

Objections

- **My parents pushed religion on me too forcefully growing up**

- *"I don't like when they indoctrinate the kids. (One respondent agreed.) They're so little. They don't even give them a chance to have their own feeling about their belief or their sense of self. (One respondent agreed.)" (Female, Austin)*
- *"Overbearing in that my mother used to drag me to church every g** d*** Sunday. No matter where we were we always had to go to church. If we didn't go to church, it was a sin. Not to go to church every Sunday. It was always the same like you said before. It's the same thing. Every week, every week. You recite the church from the beginning to the end. It's insane as it was when I was a kid. I know that it hasn't changed. Nobody questions it." (Male, Boston)*
- *"It bothers me that it's not presented as a choice. It wasn't, at least, in my case. I feel like the concepts of it are almost too much for a kid to even think about. I remember when I was trying to convert people, I was being told at school, "If you don't accept Jesus into your heart, you're going to burn in hell." I was freaking out all the time whenever I'd meet somebody who wasn't a Christian, I'd be like, "I don't want them to burn in hell. I like this person." It's just... I don't know. Children can't even... I don't think they even have the need for spirituality, at least as a five-year-old, six-year-old. I don't think you need that, really, in your life. It just depends on how extreme you take it, I guess." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"Growing up I just felt like I was pushed into going to church or whatever." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I used to attend church with my parents because I felt like I was forced and ever since I moved out I haven't attended church." (Female, Phoenix)*

Objections

- **I can't be who I am in the Christian faith**

- *"To me the whole idea of a God that requires worship is just really something I can't get behind. (one respondent agreed) " (Female, Austin)*
- *"They don't want you to ask questions, they don't want you to be in the logical camp. They want you to have faith in what they're telling you, and what's in the scriptures... if you keep questioning then you can look at other perspectives. New theories, open-minded... You can be more open-minded...then it becomes a choice." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **Christianity is too extreme for me**

- *"Hell is definitely on that list. (Laughter.) If you ask me, it seems patently ridiculous in the context of everything else in Christian philosophy, especially what Jesus said, that there would be Hell. It's inconceivable to me that there would be Hell." (Male, Austin)*
- *"You can't even have a conversation hardly with a religious person because they automatically take you as being combative even though you might be honestly asking a question. Honestly, why do you believe that. Already there you can see their blood pressure going through the room and then they're upset. Then they start I feel becoming insulting or criticizing your character for the fact that you don't just believe or that you're asking questions. I don't know. That's the experience I've had which is nuts." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I think it was a born again Christian that was very much like you needed to open, accept and to push it on your kids in order for everybody to get a holy pass through the door. The same person told me that if what's his name, the one who ate people, the serial killer...Dahmer...Yes, Dahmer. If Jeffrey Dahmer was on his last dying breath and was honestly, truly sorry in his heart, that he'd get let into the gates of heaven and sit down at the table and eat with all of us people that have tried to do right." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Christians push procreating. Having children is a big push, especially among Catholics." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"I think that hell, yes, is a harsh concept and can be used as oppression." (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"When I first started having a hard time with some Christianity, 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.... 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 pretty objectionable. It's happened many times to me, to family members. It makes you angry and sad and really pushes you away. ...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 consoling Christian." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"Indoctrinating kids who are too young to think for themselves." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- **There is no proof that anything Christians believe in actually exists**

- *"In Christianity you're essentially closing off your common sense and closing down your ability to think and you're worshiping an idea or a book or a thought. Christianity itself is based on the idea that you can't trust yourself because you are bad. Common sense, your primal feelings, your primal actions, your primal desires can't be trusted. (Several respondents agreed.)" (Female, Austin)*
- *"God wills it. That needs to stop. It's like when George W. said "God wills this war on Islam." I mean, I'm pretty sure every academic slapped themselves in the forehead, and said "Oh s***." (Laughter.) It just needs to stop. It's not like Christianity has cornered the market on it. Every religion does that. You could say that about Muslim, Judaism, you can say that about almost any religion. " (Male, Boston)*
- *"It's annoying to me. It really is, to be able to tell somebody how they're supposed to do whatever they want with their body. It intrigues me because there's no Biblical baseline for it. It's never been an issue for me because I can't trace it back to The Bible and I think I know The Bible. I've read it probably fifty times in my life and I think I know it pretty well unfortunately." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Yes, for me it's your 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 having an argument about a stop light in Beijing: I don't know if it's red or green right now, "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 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?" (Male, Phoenix)*

Objections

- **Denial of science and forcing alternative religious beliefs to be taught in public schools.**
 - *"I think it's naive to ignore nature or science. I believe in science. I think to just ignore it and say... What is it that they say, like, evolution didn't happen. Is that correct? Then I feel like they try to preach that in schools. All that kind of stuff. I just associate it with anti-science. Not having tons of facts to back it up, or evidence. That's just kind of what comes to mind. I believe that probably a lot of people don't believe global warming, perhaps maybe come from the pollution. That's kind of anti-science." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"Denial of science, and things that are known, bothers me a lot. (One respondent agreed.)" (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"Now there's the whole thing in Texas about creationism in the science books which just breaks my heart because dinosaur class was my favorite and (laughter) now the kids don't even get to learn about that anymore. There's a place to learn about Christianity. Absolutely. I think it's an important thing to learn just so you know what's going on. If someone's going to yell at you on the street or kill in the name of God, kill you in the name of God, you should know why you're being killed. (Laughter.) But it has its place." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"Their inability to accept basic science. I'm not saying higher science, but basic science. Basic biology. Basic beliefs. Reproduction in general. There's chemicals that the female body secretes to prevent pregnancy. Yes, don't be stupid. See, Tony said the Big Bang Theory, and I'm still okay with that, that's still a theory. So if you want to say that you believe in the Big Bang Theory, be my guest. But we know that the egg drops down into the uterus and there it goes. We know that we had tails and it fell off. We know that unicorns didn't just neglect to get on Noah's ark. Humans didn't run around with dinosaurs." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"It's willful blindness and being arrogant about how willfully blind you can be about a number of things. The earth is the center of the universe. (One respondent agreed.) Women are inferior to men. (One respondent agreed.) The planet's 4,000 years old. (One respondent agreed.)" (Male, Austin)*

Objections

- *"I've read a lot of articles about how Evangelical groups are actively teaching young people these things (evolution and global warming) are not to be true even though the greater western academic (laughs) institution believes these things to be true via a lot of vetted logical arguments...I think it's homeschooling but I think it's also just inundating your youth with these fears of homosexuality, fears of science and global warming, that it's not happening, these kinds of conservative political views that are I think separate from a red state republican thing but I think it's been very intelligently commandeered by the republican party. I think that they know how to appeal to certain voter blocks such as... I don't think there's anything about Christianity as a faith that results in these things intrinsically except maybe gay marriage. The Bible does say being gay is a sin. I think that's the only one. There's not really anything in The Bible that says you can't believe in global warming, that you can't have a socialist government that takes care of the poor. Actually The Bible says to take care of the poor. There isn't anything in there that says you can't have science or discover things or be curious about the world or have vaccines or whatever. (One respondent agreed.) I think there's actually very little about Christianity itself that has these offensive" (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"Teaching evolution... I was told it was absolutely wrong in school. It was not taught at my Christian school. I don't think that it has to make your faith invalid just because it goes against what The Bible says, or is different than God making the universe in seven days. It's just more of an answer of how, and not the answer of why. I feel like people miss the mark on that. My parents deny evolution, and it's just like, "Why? It's cool." Knowing things about the planet is awesome. I don't know, I don't get it...I think evolution and creationism support each other. If you really look at physics and science, and you realize that time is relative... In my mind, yes, there was a big bang, and we started from dust, but where did the dust come from? They don't have to be at the exclusion of the other. I believe in divine intervention in my life, I also believe in free will. These things don't have to fight each other, and what I think is hard for me, with some sect of the Christian view denying evolution, is, why would you choose to exclude knowledge? Why would knowledge be threatening? Why would other ideas be threatening to your own? If you're right, and it's working for you, you shouldn't be threatened by outside things. You should be open to the ideas, even if you don't take (1:04:24.8 unclear/crosstalk)." (Female, San Francisco)*

Objections

- Other

- *"I think a real simple one that's a turn off: they're just a bunch of rules. A bunch of rules. They are a bunch of rules. There's a bunch of things that you want to do that you can't. Especially when you're young, you're a teenager or things like that. You can't have sex, you can't do drugs. You have to go to church every week and sometimes multiple times a week. You have to listen to certain music. Depending on which group you're in the rules can be different, but there's a lot of them."* (Male, Austin)
- *"I guess for me one of the things of the whole turn off is where it started. Not the actual faith started but the religion, the orthodoxy of it. Mine started basically because , the way it's most boiled down to a king wanted to get a divorce and he was just like, "Okay, I'll start my own." It's just very hard for me to really have faith in something when I don't know exactly where it came from in a way. That's part of it too. It's hard – foundations upon which everything is built are kind of shaky at times."* (Male, Austin)
- *"The tendency to make things conform to what they want it to...what they're trying to push if you will. For instance, the western Jesus is a white man but in The Bible he had dark, coarse hair and was olive skinned. That wouldn't fit the western so they're like, "Oh, wait. Forget about that. He was actually a white man."* (Female, Austin)
- *"I've been told that your body is for temporary until you pass away, then you go into heaven, so someone tells me it's for temporary, then some other people are like, "Don't damage it, don't drink, don't take birth control."...Your body is a temple kind of thing?... They're saying that and then again I'm getting, "It's just temporary." It's confusing. (One respondent agreed.)"* (Female, Phoenix)



Key Findings

Evangelical Christians



Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Initial Thoughts

Evangelical Christians - Initial Comments

Initial reactions to the term “Evangelical Christians” focus on the respondent’s extreme dislike for the aggressive approach Evangelical Christians take to convincing and converting “the whole world”

- *“They believe that The Bible is infallible.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“Militant recruiting...reprogramming...brainwashing” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“For me, I think of a change...supposedly for good. I'm thinking that maybe if you decide to accept Jesus or whatever, then you're going to follow his teachings, and you will hopefully strive to live a life of love. That's what I try to think about it, for me.” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“From my understanding it is the notion that it's the duty of a Christian or at least some Christians feel it's their duty to convert others to Christianity.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“Yes. It's the new breed, the new breed of Christianity that I feel like is probably the most troubling of any kind that I've encountered so far.” (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *“I think of mission work...Much bigger focus on conversion...Speaking in tongues...I have a friend, or just someone I think is my friend, who constantly tries to convert people. Scares me.” (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *“The extremists... Everything is done to the extreme.” (Male, Boston)*
- **During the discussions, respondents spoke of Pat Robertson, Howard Phillips, James Phillips, Al Sharpton, Joel Osteen, Bobby Jindal, Ted Haggard, Oral Roberts, Michele Bachmann, Jim and Tammy Fae Baker, Jerry Farwell, Tim Tebow, Billy Graham, John Rockefeller and Dion Sanders as Evangelical Christians**

Evangelical Christians - Initial Comments

- **Many refer to Evangelical Christians as the “Bible Thumpers”**

- *“They read The Bible literally. They don’t understand the meaning behind, or they don’t understand the sentences in the context of the entire story, or the theory behind it. They form restrictions or rules, or what is not like you, not like us, that kind of thing. They all build around the misconception that is coming from reading The Bible literally. In a literal fashion. What bothers me most is that not only do they misread The Bible, but they actually reinforce the idea by teaching the others or asking the church members to follow or understand in exactly the same way as they read. Not only that, but going to the political side, they use that kind of technique to form the political agenda, such as the pro-life. What else is there? Like gay marriage, or things like that. If they approached The Bible in a more religious fashion, or even in an academic fashion where they try to understand the meaning behind, they try to understand more deeply and not just reading the surface, I think it would be much better teaching. I don’t see that happening in the church” (Female, Boston).*
- *“That’s what The Bible says to do. Yes, I was super religious. Yes, that’s what The Bible says to do. If you’re not doing it you’re not following what The Bible says. You’re supposed to try to convert the whole world.” (Male, San Francisco)*

Evangelical Christians - Initial Comments

- **And many disparagingly describe the big, classy, modern and contemporary mega churches and showy production of TV churches attended by Evangelical Christians**
 - *"it's in your face...religion should be more about that in terms of your relationship rather than filling up a stadium full of people to worship...it's almost like it's a brand. People are putting bumper stickers on their car just like they would put a Diamond Backs sticker on their car. when you put the bumper sticker on and you put the t-shirt on and you hold the sign, that's like--Are you living the life, or are you just tooting the horn?... 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...it is just to grow the business and get more money. It's like a Wal-Mart of religion. 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. More members, more revenue, more income." (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *"I've been in one mega church once. It was a very strange experience for me. I had seen on TV and heard about 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 any more. It's about being a part of a club and almost like having a good time and listening to this pastor, having the experience. 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, Phoenix)*
 - *"I don't think I've ever seen another religion pushing themselves, at least on television or social media." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"Really classy churches. There's that one, is it Joel Osteen...The Evangelicals that have glass. There's big screen TVs in front of every pew because...they're modernized too." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"IHOP. International House Of Prayers. It's a mega church." (Female, San Francisco)*



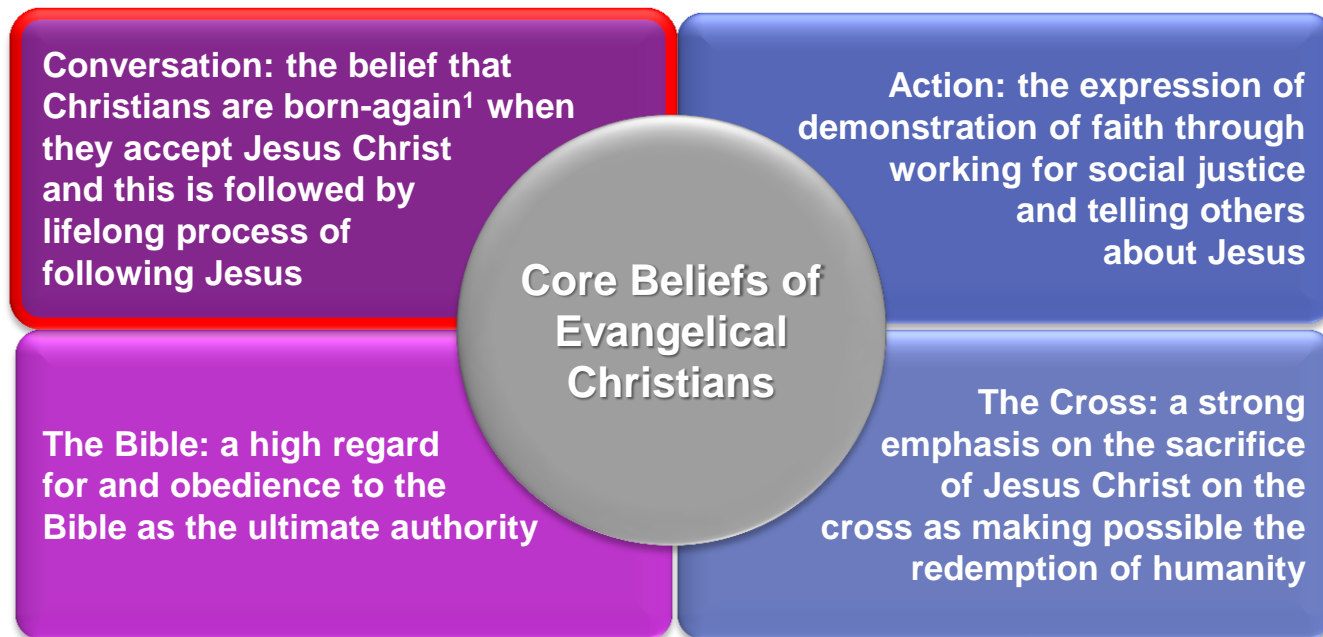
Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Core Beliefs - Conversion

Core Beliefs

Evangelical Christianity can be defined in several ways. Evangelicals make up a very diverse group with varying theology and levels of participation in their religion. They define themselves as Christians who believe in the truth and authority of the Bible, the importance of sharing their faith with others, and the belief that the only way to heaven is by being “born again” by accepting Jesus Christ. There are four core beliefs that Evangelical Christians share:



¹ Born-again is a phrase Jesus said to a person in the Bible who came to him. Jesus told the man that just as humans are born naturally (or biologically) they also need to be born spiritually. What Christians mean by the phrase “born again” is the spiritual birth – becoming alive to God.

Core Beliefs - Conversion

Respondents readily recognize “Conversion” as a part of all religions.

- *“I’m not sure that anybody understands what their idea of conversion is here, unless anyone is Evangelical. I know, like I was saying, every religion has a different definition of conversion. I think most religions have a conversion aspect to it. It’s not going to take us anywhere to discuss it if we don’t really understand what their idea of conversion is.” (Male, Boston)*
- **The idea of conversion is not in and of itself off-putting...but the aggressive, close-minded, offensive and intolerant approach experienced by many of these respondents at the hands of Evangelical Christians trying to convert them is universally rejected.**
 - *“Your development of your belief is a lifelong thing and it doesn’t happen like that. You have to struggle with those things. I don’t know. It just seems weird because it just seems like all of us. We all grew up. We all came to realize things. We’ve all grown. I just don’t see how that happens overnight.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“If conversion is a conscious choice that you’re making and it’s NOT something that’s forced on you then it could be a positive thing for you but in my experience it was really negative because it was not a choice. (Female, Austin)*
 - *“I’ve come in contact with a lot of people that identify themselves as born again Christian, and there’s this archetype of them just Bible-thumping, and they basically will shout, talk over you, they won’t let you get your word or your opinion in edgewise, at all. They’ll just, “No. You will have Jesus in your heart. That’s what you need to do.” Over and over again like a broken record, and you’re just like... You try to be polite to them, you try to argue with them, try to throw science, everything, they just won’t budge.” (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *“I think that they take conversion as their own personal gain, so if they convert someone, they’re better. A better Christian or something. I think that’s why they’re always thumping. Because they need to make more Christians, that’s their job or whatnot. I remember, when I was younger, I had this day camp or whatever, and they were having me convert children. I was nine, 5th grade, probably 4th grade, and now I look back at it, and I’m like, “How was a 4th grader bringing all these little kids to Christ?” Having all these kids like, “Repeat after me: Bring Jesus into your life.” Bla-bla-bla, “He’ll forgive all your sins...” It’s just weird that I was doing it, and I feel like it’s all a person gain for the person converting. That’s how I guess I felt.” (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Conversion

- *"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. So, 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.... 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 they're first answer to any problem is to go to church to pray. My sarcastic way of thinking of it is they're Bible thumpers." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"I think if it's a personal choice that somebody makes, it can be beautiful. I watched my mom, who I didn't have a relationship with for seven years, because she was so steeped in anger and bitterness, and was really... I didn't speak to her for six years. I moved out when I was thirteen, didn't talk to her until I was seventeen. She became a born again Christian and she was able to release those things. While there were a lot of things that were annoying, of her trying to convert me, and giving up some of her own free will and her thinking, I got my mom back, and she had some peace. It was new for her, so she felt like she wanted to share it, because it was such a great thing in her life. It's like if you have a new boyfriend or girlfriend, you want to talk about them all the time, because it's such a great thing in your life. I try and have some tolerance for that, while still maintaining the boundary of, "No, this is my life and I'm good here," but I think it can be beautiful, if it is a true spiritual awakening within that person." (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Conversion

- **Conversion appeals to many respondents if it takes place after an individual is old enough to study, understand and decide for themselves which religion best fits their needs...and provided that once made, the decision will be respected without argument, threat or condemnation.**
 - *"I didn't know what I was doing when I was 12. I didn't know anything about anything. I was just trying to have fun, do my thing. I didn't know anything about morality and the bigger picture of religion. It's a very complicated concept. But they want to grab you in there pretty young and that's a problem for me. I'd like to be able to study it for a while. Do it when you're 25...That's reasonable." (Male, Austin)*

Core Beliefs - Conversion

- **Many/most respondents balk at requiring ‘born again’ acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as the only path to salvation.**
 - *“That’s my biggest problem with Christianity and the reason I’m not a Christian. Is that it’s predicated upon this concept of Grace, right? It’s completely out of your hands, and only by the love of God saved. Nothing to do with you, no matter how good you are. It’s so far removed from any act that you do.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“All your past, the bad things you’ve done in life, all of your sins are forgiven if you’re born again. Right? ...it’s like spiritual bankruptcy...I was just making a comparison to the bankruptcy laws here. You can start fresh...a clean slate.” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“I think of it as converting into their religion...you accept Jesus & you are a “born-again” Christian.” (Female, Boston)*
 - *“That was my friend that said that she was born again and I was going to hell” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“I don’t want to be told that I have to be born again. If it works for them that’s fine....They’re making it a brand. I have a bumper sticker that says, “Born okay the first time.” (Laughter.)” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“... I don’t know how at 11 years old she could be born again when she’s not old enough and her friend’s not old enough to know truly what path she’s going down... When I think of born again in the religious sense it’s what they want to do with their Christianity. That’s what I think of when I hear it...I’d be easier with a word like reaffirmed or something like that. (Two respondents agreed.) I’m choosing to have this religion as opposed to something about born again.” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“I would question people’s motivation for being born again...I’m just skeptical so I’m like, “Alright, why are you born again, all of a sudden your 52 years old? What’s in it for you?” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“I think that that’s psychologically manipulative. That’s part of the power structure right there. (One respondent agreed.) That’s an exclusionary inclusionary cult like tactic. It has no practical meaning in any sense of the word that can be detected but it makes people feel that they belong now. Yes, it’s trying to lock you in there. It’s getting out of the whole Christianity feel there. Just by born again. It’s like what? (One respondent agreed.) Because when you’re born again you have to do it over again and believe only in that particular...? You’re locked in for life. (One respondent agreed.) This is it. It’s getting out of the subject of being a Christian. My view of a Christian is more open to do, nothing like conversion I would say.” (Male, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Conversion

- **In particular, these individuals believe the message of living a good life of love, tolerance, acceptance, forgiveness and The Golden Rule is much more critical to salvation.**
 - *"I think that the concept of born again in Evangelical Christians, I think it's important for them to look at it not in the context of "Oh, I believe so now I'm off the hook, but I need to believe and look at my actions. How my actions affect myself, how my actions affect other people." You need to improve yourself as an individual being according to these teachings to truly be born again. Not just "Oh, I believe this now and I'm okay." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"It feel like it's fake because they're just like "Okay, now I'm 'born-again' so I'm going to do everything The Bible tells me and I'm now going to be okay to go to Heaven regardless of what I did." ... What I think of, are people who have done horrible, horrible things and are trying to save face. I see pedophiles, rapists, murderers turning to this because it's open to them so that they can save face. I don't think it really has anything to do with if they're going to make it to Heaven or not. I think it's a last resort type of thing if it is to make it to Heaven. It's like, "Oh, well, I'm going to die soon, so I might as well try to get to Heaven now." I see it as something fake. I see it as something that is like a last resort. The end is coming near, I've got to wrap it up quickly, become an EC or whatever so I can go to Heaven. It's all based on where you're going to go when you die. I've seen more people who've done a lot of awful things becoming these "born-again." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"There might have been a recent story which might help illustrate what your point is. It was that one republican senator/representative that had a full on affair with a girl down in South America and then there was the democratic one which basically just put a picture of himself in his underwear on Chat Roulette or whatever it was. The republican had the full blown affair, has been forgiven, and reelected because the Christians love a good redemption story. They love somebody to say "Oh, I'm sorry, and now I've found God and I'm really sorry, but God's going to help me." The democratic party people, who aren't that Evangelical, were like, "That's not a good excuse. What were you doing?" You were supposed to be an adult... They love that redemption story. You can be a bad person and then throw yourself at the feet of Jesus and then suddenly you're accepted again. You're the coolest guy in the world." (Female, Boston)*

Core Beliefs - Conversion

- **“Born again” is an unfamiliar term for many respondents.**

- *“I have a question, just because I'm unsure. Is conversion the same thing as proselytizing? Meaning if I am Roman Catholic, and I live my life according to the teachings of Jesus, I've already accepted Jesus. When I hear convert, I go from one religion to another religion. If I'm a Roman Catholic who believes in Jesus, I already... I'm already there. So how does this tenant, this core belief, how would an evangelical Christian view me if I'm already believing in Jesus and living my life according to his teachings?... Is it living life according to their beliefs...their interpretation? Is it that Evangelicals want to proselytize to get you literally to convert and conversion is accepting their religious worldview? ” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I think born again sounds silly. It just sounds silly.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“Can you be a lapsed Evangelical? If you've already been born again, can you be reborn again?” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I think the word “born-again” is thrown out a lot in liberal Massachusetts as negative, but, quite frankly, I really don't know exactly what it means.” (Female, Boston)*

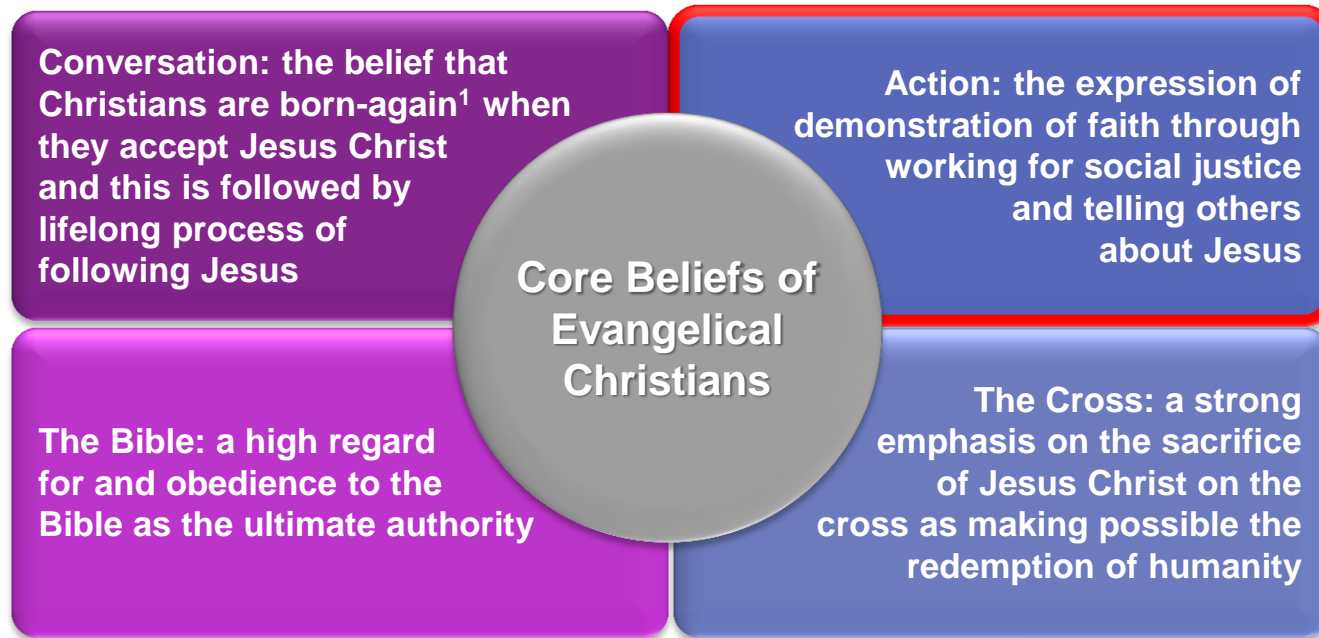


Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Core Beliefs - Action

Core Beliefs



Core Beliefs - Action

“Action” is seen first and foremost as public evangelizing in hopes of informing and converting non-believers.

- *“That's more like what he was talking about it seems like. The evangelizing form of the belief system where you would go out and spread the word.” (Male, Austin)*
- *“Two things come to my mind. Like charitable, good works, helping out around the community. That's what I thought at first. Then, telling others about Jesus, that made me think about the people that ran into you, the teenagers. People coming up and talking to me about Jesus scares the hell out of me. I'm like "Get away from me." (Male, Boston)*
- *“I remember these gentlemen that were well-dressed, but they came up and started talking about religion. And I immediately thought “cult.” I was like -- that's what I always think about.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I thought of it as someone super Christian. Someone who really tries to preach it and push it on others. All about it. It's their whole life. It's not just their Sunday ritual. It's their whole life.” (Female, Boston)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **Many are open to “being informed”...but only if and when they request it.**

- *“Why can't they tell people who want to know? (Laughter.) (Two respondents agreed.) If you've already said you think I'm going to hell I am good with it, walk away. I don't want to know.”*
- *“If you really want me to actually consider converting to your religion, then be somebody that I would want to emulate. Don't just preach and shove it down my throat. Prove it to me. That's not going to get it anywhere. It's my own life and my own beliefs. But be somebody that I admire. Be someone that lives a life that I think is worthy of emulating, and then I will take different parts of that that you greatly attribute to making up why you act the way you act, why you are who you are. Then I would consider looking at them more closely.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I really struggle because I feel like it's force fed. I feel like you force feed people in this world. That's where the people get turned off with religion. (One respondent agreed.) If you want to talk about spirituality let's have a glass of wine, let's sit around, let's have a nice dinner and let's talk about spirituality and the greater gifts of life. Really, if you want to shove your views down with restraints and constriction or restriction rather, I don't know if I want to talk about that.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“There's nothing I guess wrong about it, telling other people what you believe. I guess it just depends on the way in which you do so.” (Male, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **As discussed earlier, however, aggressive “convincing and converting” is universally rejected.**
 - *“My thing is I don’t have a problem with someone going out and trying to convert people to their belief. If they think it’s the best way for people to live their lives, then to me it’s okay for you to come and tell me about it. The social justice part and then the whole beating the people over the head with it. If you can’t accept that I’m not going to accept it, just leave it alone. I understand that you really do believe it’s your mission to convert as many people as possible. For what you believe, that is what you should be doing in a way.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“Whenever I see the guys on the bicycles go by, our parents were like, “Shut the windows, (laughter) close the drapes. Turn off all the electricity. Just be silent and still...I’m afraid of anybody on a bike with a book. (Laughter.) It’s just like, “Run the other direction.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“The pushy thing...They’re being pushy on other people. Having been raised a Christian it’s so strange to me that you’re stopping me to tell me that I need to be born again when you don’t even know me. Why are you talking at me like that. It’s pushy. It’s pushy. It’s disrespectful.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“Since we’re talking about Evangelicals, when I was growing up in my own religion, it’s a huge thing to share about Jesus. We do the same thing as Evangelicals or Methodists. They have people who go out and tell other people. And I guess they would equate it to whenever you love something a lot, or someone, and you just want to tell it to the world, how awesome this person is. Whenever I started dating my current boyfriend, I was really excited. I wanted all of my friends to meet him. To them, that’s the way they view it. I guess I understand it. To me, personally, I respect it. Okay, cool, you want to tell me about it, then sure I’ll listen. But that’s where it stops. If you’re trying to convert me, then maybe if I find it extremely interesting, I’ll join your fight. But if it stops there where you’re just sharing and showing, and not only just telling me about it, but showing that you actually believe it with your acts, maybe I’ll be more interested. I think that’s where people, or Christians, sometimes don’t necessarily follow what they preach.” (Male, Boston)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- *“What would you do is a magician came to your door and said, “I’m going to give you this potion and I want you to take this and I promise you that if you do that you will be wealthy.” Really? No one wants to hear that. That sounds great! But I still have to go to work in the morning. It does, but that would sound a little bit better than the magician coming in and telling you, “By the way, everything you’ve been doing up until this point, completely wrong.” (One respondent agreed.) “You are wrong, you suck as a person. Here, let me fix that.” That doesn’t sit well with anybody, ever.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“The telling about Jesus is obnoxious. Truly... Everyone knows where to go to hear about Jesus. You can get a Bible for free wherever. It’s don’t think you need to tell people about your beliefs...Walk in any direction, you’re bound to find a church. (One respondent agreed.)...It’s not hard to seek out, if someone wants it. I think just trying to manipulate people and wanting to try and get them to go to your church, you know what I mean? I don’t like that..” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“Yes, I think a lot of The Bible is guidelines that 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. I’d want to do that. Anyone of any religion should be doing that, but I think that should just be in the name of living 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. Unnecessary...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.” (Male, Phoenix)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **The meaning of “Social Justice” as part of the core beliefs is questioned in all groups.**

- *“How do they define “Social justice”?...Whose social justice?...Are you you're talking about social justice from the perspective of the Evangelical Christians, or social justice in Christianity in general?” (Male, Austin)*
- *“I guess I don't really like the term social justice either. It sits badly with me. I had to make a real effort to say I don't really know what the Evangelical social justice action plan is. I'm kind of putting the Christian one that we've already rallied against into their action plan. I don't... I kind of think it is similar. It still is going to be pro-life. I can't see it being more inclusive than the other things. I see it is being very white, and so I see racial issues, but I honestly don't know what their platform is.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“One of the primary tenets of social justice is to meet someone where they're at. If you're going to have a conversation you meet them where they are, and then you roll with the resistance that they give you in talking, but you're supposed to take cues from them to gauge if they are ready to change their views and mindsets on things. You pretty much erase that by saying “and telling others about Jesus.” You don't give the person a chance to voice their ideas about what social justice is. It's just like here's your soup and then here's your Jesus. It just erases it all.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“I don't really know what their definition of social justice is, but I can't imagine it being the same definition that I have, again, because of what Alexis was saying. With the “and telling others about Jesus”, that doesn't really fit with my personal view on social justice. It doesn't even make sense on a smaller level because to me, social justice is a huge movement. Not with just a few people.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“What does social justice here mean in this context? I'm curious.” (Male, San Francisco)*
- *“I don't know what “social justice” means in their context.” (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **Most/all respondents react favorably to their own interpretation of “Social Justice” as a goal of religion.**
 - *“I don't think social justice just means evangelizing. Christian churches, for all the flaws that we acknowledge do do things for people that are good. They do soup kitchen runs like that. I think that social justice is doing good for the less fortunate. Really basic, whether it's at home or in Africa, wherever, helping people out who are less fortunate. That's amazing and that's great, voluntarily doing that. What I want to put my faith in is humans are doing that on their own, not because they're forced to. It just so happens that probably 80 to 90 percent of it happens through a religious organization, They do that because they're trying to curry favor with whatever they believe in. It's Christianity, it's Judaism, it's all of them. There's a component to that now, but I prefer they do it because that's the right thing to do and they believe they should help somebody out. Yes, a lot better and simpler. (One respondent agreed.) In the end it's being done, and that's good. Schools are being built, or food is being passed out or whatever. In the end, at the end of the day it's being done. Whatever the motivation was, I'm not sure that that's not as important.” (Male, Austin)*
 - *“It's beautiful when you serve soup to the homeless but when you serve the soup and say, "Here, have your soup. By the way, do you know Jesus?" That's what's wrong to me (two respondents agreed) because yes, I think everybody should do communal. I think that is all of our responsibility to do that stuff but when you tie your religion to it...No, you don't do that. You do it because it's another human not because they're a Christian.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“They got the idea to do it because of Christianity. I think that sometimes it can be okay and if it's a very gentle thing. I've come across some really beautiful people in my life, strangers who have just helped me and they're like, "No, I'm doing this because Jesus asked me to be kind to everyone." They left that conversation open. If I wanted to talk to them about Jesus that I could but I didn't and so they left me alone. They were just being kind. I think a lot of things like churches can do a lot of good things for people. I think if they were actually doing what Jesus wanted you to do which is be kind and be giving and give of yourself then I think that would be perfect. But what they're doing is they're trying to run a specific agenda that satisfies whatever specific interpretation about tolerance from The Bible that they're to get to. I think gentle reminders, it's okay to say I'm doing this because Jesus taught me. If you are trusted and being in a loving place and surrounded by loving people and if you like what I'm doing and you want to be a part of this then come join me on Sunday. There's a great group of people. But when you're yelling at them and saying... (One respondent agreed.)” (Female, Austin)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **But many feel that their past interactions with Evangelicals are inconsistent with this definition.**
 - *"The social justice that I was talking about in Evangelical churches gets into like, "Go shoot someone who provides abortions because that's morally justifiable, because you're saving the lives of thousands of unborn babies and that is considered social justice." I have serious issue with things like, "Let's murder to save people."*
 - *"Working for social justice, it blows my mind but in their view the book that they found is what social justice should be... They think it's their social duty to spread the word. Is that what you mean by social justice?... I think they might have skewed views or skewed from my point of view. They have their own views of what it is and it's not necessarily the best thing for society. It's just what's best for them."*
 - *"I find that I'm a little surprised to hear social justice mentioned actually with Evangelicals... Because social justice is generally connected with social programs, political liberalism, and things like that. My understanding was that Evangelicals are usually politically conservative so I find that inconsistent... They're not in favor of what I would traditionally think of as social justice... Yes, social justice to me is the notion of critical theory and people who have been mistreated because of their race, because of their gender, because of their sexuality. Social justice aims to rectify a lot of historical injustices that have taken place. I don't believe Christians have been slighted very much so I have a tough... I have a tough time believing that they even have a perspective from which they can enact a social justice agenda." (Male, San Francisco)*
 - *"That's not a term I would ever associate with them... Because they are oppressing other people, preventing other people from having social justice, as part of their curriculum... Gay marriage, abortion..." (Female, San Francisco)*
 - *"I volunteer at the Irish pastoral center, because my husband's from Ireland, and it's the Catholic pastoral center. I volunteer for them, because they help everyone, and they help like I have not seen anyone else help. I wish that my faith had services the way they have services, and that they were available to everyone. I personally – I hear what you're saying, you have – I personally haven't seen that in the evangelical church. It seems like, "If you believe what we believe, or you at least act like you do, then we'll help you. We have a lot of resources." But, "I'm altruistic, I'm helping you because that's what Jesus told me to do, without asking anything in exchange," I don't really see that..." (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- *"I think it's a little unfair to say that you can't associate social justice with evangelical Christians. I work with international development sphere as I mentioned earlier, and the largest international aid organization is World Vision. It's a Seattle-based Christian group. That's the largest organization that's distributing resources and money to aid in the developing world. Yes, I totally get it that some of their motivation might be a little unfair, because they want to convert people, but that's a really large distribution of resources that's happening, and I think it's really important to acknowledge that...Isn't social justice also just ensuring that all human beings have basic human rights and dignity, and are able to live their lives at a certain standard? There are lots of evangelical organizations who are just helping people get by in the world with enough food, and be free from war." (Female, San Francisco)*
- *"Prayer over your meal, and saying you'll go to hell if you don't subscribe to a religion, are very different...They're very different, and that's what you see with Evangelicals. That's what has been my experience...The motivation is what bothers me. I would prefer that they wanted to help people just to help, and it's the right thing to do...It's about your motives I guess. Some people have good motives and some people don't." (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - Action

- **A few believe that working for “Social Justice” is at odds with a strict adherence to The Bible.**
 - *“You can’t work for social justice and have a strict obedience to The Bible. That’s not possible in today’s world...You’d have to stone Lee. Sorry, Lee. You seem like a nice guy. (Laughter)...That’s straight out of the Old Testament. Destroyed two cities and turned a woman into a pillar of salt. So if we’re believing the obedience to The Bible, we cannot work towards social justice. Those teachings can work for parts of social justice, but to fully buy into action, it can’t be done. Maybe it’s the word obedience.” (Male, Boston)*
- **Others criticize Evangelicals for “advertising” their good works.**
 - *“One of the big turnoffs for me is they feel the need to advertise their actions. I have no problem giving money to a charity. I don’t feel the need to advertise it to the world that I’ve given money. Why is it if I give a thousand dollars to Boston Strong I need to tell the world that I did it. I did it because I wanted to do it. Whereas most Evangelical Christians will do it and then they will make sure that everyone who knows them knows that they gave a thousand dollars to it. It’s that action that because I did it, I’m a good Christian. That’s the reason why I did it. It’s like no, you do it because you want to do it. You don’t have to advertise it...I’m like, just do it because that’s what you feel is the right thing to do, not because your religion is telling you and you feel the need to advertise because a religion told you to do it. ” (Male, Boston)*

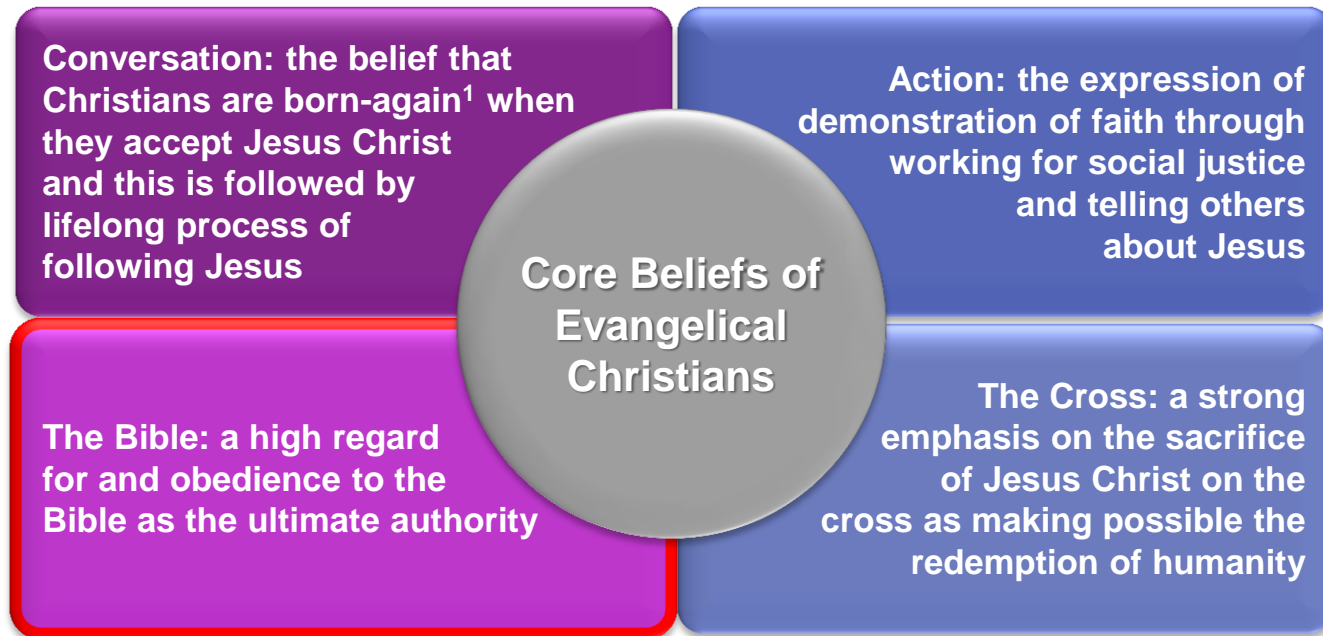


Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Core Beliefs – The Bible

Core Beliefs



Core Beliefs - The Bible

As discussed earlier in this report these respondents come into these groups with well formed perceptions of “The Bible.”

- **All of these respondents view The Bible is a book of stories and believe that these stories have likely undergone significant changes as they were translated across languages and handed down through time.**
- **None believe The Bible is the Word of God to be taken literally...but rather describe it as the selected writings of a few men who came after Jesus and may not have even known him.**
- **Many of these respondents have read The Bible at least once and have difficulty rallying around it or believing much of what is said...especially in the Old Testament.**
- **Many, and especially Female respondents, feel The Bible clearly depicts men as superior to women.**

Core Beliefs - The Bible

- **It is, therefore, not at all surprising when these same respondents express significant difficulty in accepting the truth and ultimate authority of The Bible.**
 - *"It definitely puts it that they take it as the ultimate truth. In my family my mom was the more faithful of the two, my dad was more practical about religion in a way, I feel like, He told me, 'John, you've got to take The Bible with a grain of salt sometimes.' Noah's ark may have happened to a certain extent but it's not necessarily the end of the entire world. Not every single species on the earth got on this boat and survived that way. That kind of thing. But a lot Evangelical Christians, I'm generalizing here, they take it literally. I can't do that...You can use it to justify anything. So, it's a little silly to me. You can have both sides of an argument go on forever. If they do believe it's the truth, what truth is it? It's not scientific, you can twist it any way you want." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"One thing that I think The Bible, even though there's so many different interpretations and there's so many different things that The Bible says, it's all right according to religion because it's all in The Bible. (Laughs.) You could go any way you want...Then you're okay because you believe in The Bible and you're doing what's right in The Bible." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"Yes. I think it's a nice idea to maybe say that we're going to do everything in The Bible but if you're not going to do it don't pretend that you do. That's one interesting thing about Christianity is that they put this book on a pedestal and yet they only pay attention to the last 1/10 of it. (Laughter.) They ignore the first 9/10 of it which is a really big deal because there's a lot of other stuff going on that they completely ignore and they pick and choose. The dwell on the last couple of chapters." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"An ultimate authority. The Bible. The book of stories is the ultimate authority...If you actually behaved in the way that The Bible describes about slavery, beating your wife, killing your children, you'd go to jail a lot.. And the fact that it's written by men. That it was not the word of God. It can't be the ultimate authority...And changed over and over again." (Female, Boston)*
 - *"Can't do it. I'm out. I'm all out. (Laughter.) The best I can give The Bible is the basic instructions before leaving Earth. It's a good guideline put together by a room full of people like this that all had their own individual agenda in what got in. It's an interesting read but for all intents and purposes it's fiction because even if it was the spoken word of God, a whole bunch of men sat in a room and decided what got to go inside the spine." (Female, Phoenix)*

Core Beliefs - The Bible

- *"To regard something like that as the ultimate authority, I feel like it is fiction. It's something that you sit there and read and go, 'Yes, that's kind of cool.' Then you turn the page and you're like, 'That's stupid.'" (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"I can't do it. I can't accept it because The Bible just gives me a set of rules and obedience to go by. Something that was created very long ago." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"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.)...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." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"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 timeframe. 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." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"There's a lot of nonsense in The Bible." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"People just pick and choose and it's real convenient to pick certain things out of context and turn it into an agenda." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"You can interpret it and do really nice things or you can interpret it and do really crappy things." (Female, Austin)*
- *"I don't like to have an upper authority. I think I have a brain. I can think for myself. As was said once he was like 'Je vis, donc je pense,' 'I live, therefore I think.' I could think for myself. I could decide for myself. I don't think I need a higher authority to obey." (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"There is discomfort to looking to The Bible as the authority. It's just absolute. There's no change. There's no collusion. (One respondent agreed.) It is what it is and you're going to follow it. (Two respondents agreed.)" (Male, San Francisco)*
- *"It's just silly. I feel like The Bible is a great story book, I think it's something that we can learn from, great stories, and there are a lot of morals to learn, but to take it literally is, I think, silly." (Female, San Francisco)*

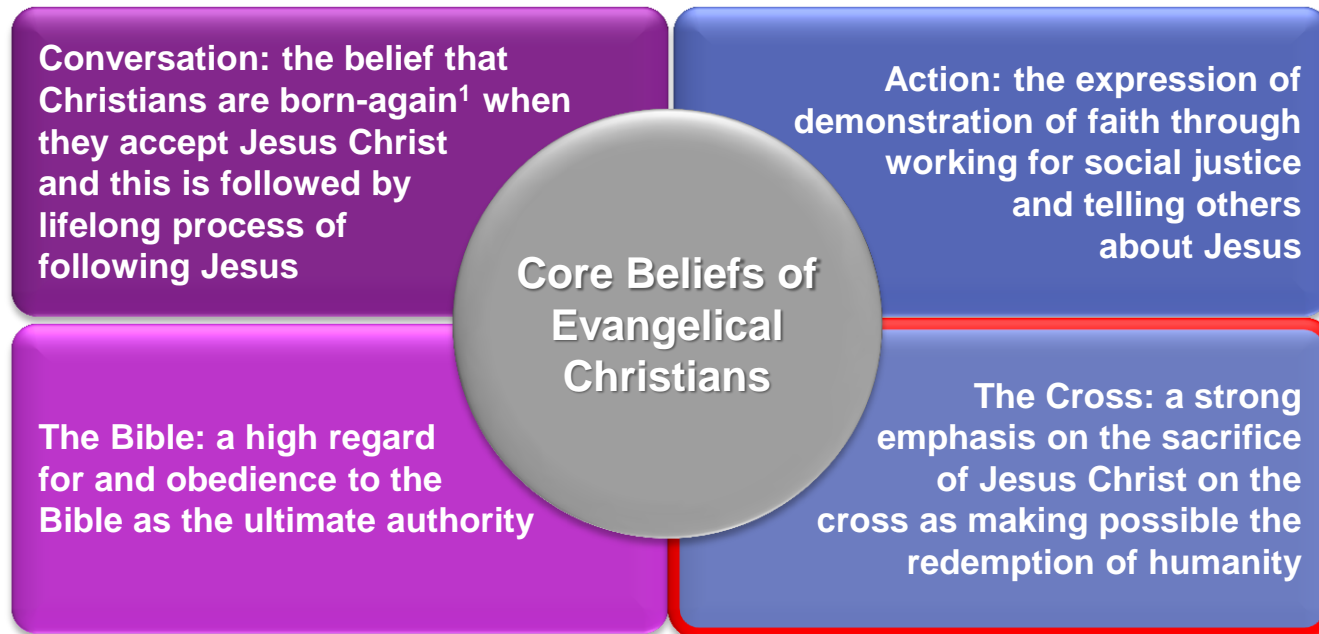


Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Core Beliefs – The Cross

Core Beliefs



Core Beliefs - The Cross

These respondents describe “The Cross” as a long-time religious symbol used by many religions throughout history.

- *“The cross was developed from the ancient Mayans and the omens because they had their signature which is the center of their universe and they would put a cross on their tree, their sacred tree. Then the Christians came over and developed that as their religious symbol. I personally have that view of that. It's not necessarily what... It doesn't represent all that people claim it to.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“Out of all four categories, the cross is the one I'm most comfortable with. It's a symbol. I have no problem with that. I don't find it offensive.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“I think of it like a marker. Just a signal that you're in the club.” (Male, Phoenix)*
- *“I think it's more just a symbol to identify each other.” (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - The Cross

- **Most do not find anything offensive about The Cross itself, but a few respondents find certain graphic executions of the crucifix containing the tortured and bloody remains of Jesus as offensive and unnecessary.**
 - *“That’s morbid in my opinion. I’ve always found that to be very morbid...Why can’t it be an angel? Or a dove, or something more symbolic and more from a happier time. Even a picture of Jesus. His face would be better...but every time you go to church you sit down and you look at the bloody Jesus on the cross...You’re like, “Why am I sitting here in front of him at probably the worst time?” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“If I was murdered and strung up on a cross I wouldn’t want to have this statue of that put into every establishment...If you read The Bible it says that you’re not supposed to pray to any statues or deities or objects of any kind. It’s a complete contradiction of every book today...It’s supposed to be internal. Again, if you’re going to follow The Book and read The Book you can’t do the actions without going against The Book. (Two respondents agreed.)” (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *“You’re mixing up the message with the messenger. The point of Jesus’ life, yes he made the ultimate sacrifice, but did you listen to all the other stuff he said before? Because that stuff was important too, and if you’re hung up on him being killed, I think that it can distract from... He was pretty clear about helping the poor, and not judging people, and being of service in your life. He was pretty clear on that. That wasn’t a side note, that was the focus. If your focus becomes his torturous death, and how gruesome can you make the body, but how awesome can you make the abs at the same time. It’s more than creepy to me. I think it distracts from the beautiful parts of Christianity, which is the life that you can live with it.” (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - The Cross

- *"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, that whole long scene. But it's just weird to me to think a little bit about how such a morbid symbol, 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...a heart...a dove...a rainbow...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...When you think about it, it is morbid. I don't think a lot of people think about what it comes from...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. .. I thought it was more or less to remind people that he died for sins (several respondents agreed) and that—the Catholics put the body on the cross. All the other Christian religions that have just a cross, not the body. I just think that's so strange 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...It's probably done that way intentionally to make a point to say, "Look how much he suffered." (One respondent agreed.)...the gorier the better.." (Male, Phoenix)*

Core Beliefs - The Cross

- **Knowing that many of these respondents question Jesus as God, his redemption then ascension into heaven, and Original Sin, it is not surprising to find out that several of these same respondents push back when Evangelicals use The Cross as a symbol for the redemption of humanity.**
 - *"I just never ever understood the whole original sin thing.) I can't even grasp that concept. Why?" (Female, Austin)*
 - *"The resurrection, he's going to come back and save the good people, I'm a good person but I'm not Christian. Does that mean I'm going to hell? ...Good people who aren't Christian or evangelical Christians, they just go to hell?" (Female, Austin)*
 - *"What about the hundreds of people that died following him? Why just that? There are communities. I don't understand the cross being the symbol of redemption." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"This is always one of the things that I felt was the ickiest part of Christianity in general. It in itself is such a negative, such a downer of a concept. Yes, we're all imperfect creatures, but why focus so much on our imperfections? Why not celebrate the beautiful, diverse creatures that we are? Why not look at all the good that we can accomplish? Why focus so much on everything we do wrong? That, to me, is my big hang up on that aspect of it. It just focuses on too much of the negativity in humanity rather than all of the good that we do...If you're focusing so much on the negative, that's what your obsession is going to be, and it's going to be an avoidance of the negative rather than reaching towards the positive." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"For those people who are Christians, and I posed this question in my class, if Jesus had been dragged to Rome in chains and fed to the lions, would you all be rocking a lion around your neck?... I understand symbols are important. Every religion and every culture has had symbols. But is the Roman choice of execution for Jesus, really the best symbol?... I think you bring up a great point. I'm not a religious person at all myself, but your ultimate point being the symbol is not nearly as important as the message." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"The whole cross idea is whack. I feel like, for some people, it just lets them feel like it's okay to keep sinning, and it's okay, because they'll be forgiven, because Jesus died for them. It's like saying being bad is okay. I think some people misuse that...I agree on that point, that it's just, "It's okay, I'm forgiven no matter what, because Jesus died for me, and if I work hard to convert other people to my faith, it's my golden ticket to heaven." (Female, San Francisco)*

Core Beliefs - The Cross

- *"It's like something's wrong. When I grew up, it was all about sin. We were all sinful and you couldn't wash that away even with baptism. You still were going to be a sinner and you were still... Unless you followed the church all the time and you read The Bible all the time and that was a part of your life every day... That word of redemption is very negative because it gives the connotation that we are always dirty and bad and awful people... God created us. He didn't create us perfect. Then he got mad at us and decided to take his son and let him die... It's just not a good story. I don't buy his story." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Most importantly, is if somebody on the other side of the world never had the option to hear about Jesus, they're still going to Hell. That's the part I can't hang with. I can't even wear a cross. I dug out a cross yesterday out of my jewelry box. It was one that my parents gave me for confirmation, and I put it back. I haven't worn it for twenty years because it literally physically hurts to wear it. It makes me think about everything that is negative embodied in the cross. That we are evil. We are sinful. And, that without that, you can't ever be right." (Female, Boston)*
- *"Why do I need to be redeemed? What did my ancestors do far, far back in the past that I have to be redeemed for now? You don't choose to be born. No one chooses to be born, they're just here and they come here, so you're telling me I have to be... Why? Why do I have to be redeemed?" (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"Also the redemption of humanity. Do you mean we are just born as bad and evil and we have to... Somebody gave his life up to purify us? Why? Why am I bad? I was born. I was a kid. I got raised in a good family. I'm a good person. I help other people out. I was born just evil?... Yes, and if so there's still a lot of people that are born evil. (Laughter.) Didn't get rid of it... I'm not saying it's ridiculous but it's the redemption of humanity. Like humans are bad and evil innately. They're born as impure and bad... it doesn't fit... I'm going to go ahead and say that is a ridiculous notion. (Laughter.) Because the redemption of humanity is a redemption from original sin which requires the myth of Garden of Eden to be true. There's all kinds of problems with that... That's a myth. We've got plenty of scientific evidence that completely contradicts that... I think that the idea of redemption of humanity strongly depends on the myth of the Garden of Eden being factually true and original sin. I happen to think that religion works really well and maybe this is even the cause of it. Religion works really well as a metaphor for the trouble... the discrepancy between trying to live your ideals and live in reality, live in the real world, at the same time. I can run with that one for hours. (Laughter.) In short, that's what I think religion really is but it's not literally true. That's as close as it comes to being literally true. It works on a metaphorical level but needing some sort of redemption from original sin is pure myth." (Male, San Francisco)*



Key Findings

Evangelical Christians

- Final Summary

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

At the end of the groups, “Evangelical Christians” are generally described as passionate and outspoken believers...enjoying a high profile in America today.

- *“I think one thing about evangelical Christians, the main thought I get is just the power of an idea and the fact that at least from what I know a lot of these evangelical Christians, they really do just believe with all their heart in this doctrine. They're just very brainwashed by it and hypnotized by it and they don't necessarily mean to be hateful or intolerant. I don't think many people necessarily mean to. They're just so wrapped up in that that's just their whole life and they can't see outside that. They have to touch people with that and they have to have other people know that because it makes them feel a certain way, so they want that for other people or whatever.” (Female, Austin)*
- *“To me it's a religion that is absolute. There's not gray areas with Evangelical Christians. It's black or white. It's correct or wrong...what you see on TV, what you read in the paper. It's that they're a group who are forceful with their beliefs, in that you either believe everything that they say is 100% true, or you're not Evangelical. Either you're all in or...There's no room for moderation. There's no room for anything else.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“At this point it's Evangelical Christians in the United States. That's the flavor of the month, for lack of a better terminology. Every religion has had their peak. Roman Catholicism is waning. In our society, Muslims have never been, but Christianity has always been a main part of the United States. Evangelical Christians are on the high at this point. In any religion, and Texas is a perfect example, but the victor always writes the story. Right now, Evangelical Christians, whether they are, they feel they are the victor, so they are going to write the story. You can see it in religious history stories. Texas is a perfect example. The school board is dictating what should be said because most of the school board is run by Evangelical Christians. What they say will spread throughout the country because Texas is a huge state. No publishing company is going to make 50 different versions of a book. If Texas says it, then more than likely, most other places will. So Evangelical Christians are riding the wave of being on top. They're going to try to rewrite as much as they can in their view of things.” (Male, Boston)*
- *“They make their religion a big part of their life and they're very passionate and dedicated to it.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“They're not shy about it. They'll express themselves outwardly. They'll say vehemently, “I'm a born-again Christian,” and they will... It's like a small terrier. Just come at you. That's just what I think.” (Female, San Francisco)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **Across the groups, Evangelicals Christians are described as believing in spreading their word much more than other religions, doing so in obnoxious and unacceptable ways and incapable of or unwilling to accept/respect different beliefs from others.**
 - *"I think one of the things that we all talk about for Evangelicals is the definition of spreading the word, mentioned a lot. Whereas perhaps the form of the other groups, other sects is to keep to themselves about it, which is how Jesus would have wanted it. He said that, "Pray on your own." It is the Evangelicals by the definition that are out there, Sunday morning TV, billboards, wherever they can be, spreading the word. Whatever good intentions, and they're probably good intentions—" (Male, Austin)*
 - *"I agree with what he's saying in saying that yes, they take the conversion part, or coercion as he said, most seriously. When they're coming from a place where they have The Bible as their support system and they come to you where you haven't use of— you might not believe in The Bible. You don't know how to use that social support system that they have. You don't have much to go on other than what they're telling you. Because of that, to me, it puts them in a place to where they're so superior. Then therefore can get the clout, that we give them. That's my point of view on that." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"I don't care what you believe. Believe what you believe but at least respect that I have my ways and I don't want your beliefs because I have my own. Thank you. It's just it's annoying and it's heartbreaking sometimes because it's like, "Really? You can't just be okay with the way I am?" I just want them to leave me alone. (Laughter.)" (Female, Austin)*
 - *"It would be hard to be friends with them without being very accepting of their religion. In general most people I'm friends with I couldn't even tell you what their religion is as a general..." (Female, Phoenix)*
 - *"I perceive them as fake but very positive attitudes. They're very outgoing and you can develop a friendship with them, but once they know they have your trust they start to bring in their religion about God or Jesus, about The Bible, and that's when... I can listen but I seem to tune out because they're very close minded. I feel like they're close minded and they don't know what else is out there... They treat it like a job." (Female, Phoenix)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **The visible and outspoken of the Evangelicals have earned for their entire group a reputation as the most distasteful of distasteful groups.**
 - *"They're pretty confident. I'd respond to them. I'd say, to me, as a group if I was to put them on a continuum of distasteful groups, they would be more distasteful than other Christian groups." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"For me from a Rocky Mountain State hearing the war on Planned Parenthood in Texas by the Evangelicals blows my mind. (One respondent agreed.) I can't believe it." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"I was just remembering because we always had the Evangelicals outside in our quad in school and they were horrible terrible people and would make people cry. It would always cause a riot and we had this horse that was the freedom of speech. It was essentially like so people could go have speeches and what have you or if there was something the school was doing you could protest there. These Evangelicals would stand on that horse and just piss off the students and be just mean. Then I was just remembering how horrible it was and also entertaining to see the people who would stand up to them." (Female, Austin)*
 - *"We're going to hammer you until you convert, until you become like us. Rather than letting our actions speak for themselves, our actions letting them say "Wow, they are out there. They're working for social justice. They are spreading the word of Jesus. They are with the poor. They are working in soup kitchens. They are working for equality." That's really something I want to be a part of. There's a reason for the saying "You get a lot more flies with honey than you do with vinegar." The problem is that the conversion piece is the vinegar." (Male, Boston)*
 - *"This kind of sounds a lot like the family radio that I was raised with, and that telling other people about Jesus was the main thing. I still remember when I was a kid being handed packets this big that said "The end is near. Do you know who you are?" or something like that, and my Dad telling me to crawl over and put them in people's windshields and stuff. This just conjures up that memory for me, thinking about redemption and then the ultimate authority and telling others about Jesus. It just sounds like whack job Christianity, and that just makes me angry, I guess. I'd say that EC's have no credibility in my world, but at the same time, they're free to do what they are going to do. I'm not trying to convert them to atheism. I'm going to let you do your thing, I just wish for the same respect for me to let me do my thing without trying to change my views. Just as much as you believe in your God, I believe in my no God. Let's meet each other there and just part ways." (Female, Boston)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- *"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. We just stopped being friends. He tried to drag me to church with him a couple of times and I just said, "You're nuts"– "I can't drink the Kool Aid"– join the cult and march off the cliff with all the Evangelical people...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." (Male, Phoenix)*
- *"I am all about everyone having their own choices, and I think that's something that... I try not to be judgmental. I think that's totally appropriate that people have faith in Jesus Christ and this EC religion. The only issue that I have with it is the preaching to everyone else and the missionary standpoint that we have to recruit and get people to come into our team, or however they might be thinking about it. That is where I have issues with it. But I believe that people should make their own decisions. It just gets really messy when people are persuaded and coerced, especially if they are not educated, if they don't really have any other... If they're in a rural area, in the middle of nowhere, this might be their only option. The only thing they've been taught." (Female, Boston)*
- *"They're the crazier of the Christianity sects. The whole born again thing and like you said, the singing ...intense...visual...more intense (two respondents agreed)...I think they're very boisterous. They're very out there about their beliefs. They put their opinions on others a lot. When I think of them I think of I need to hide." (Female, Phoenix)*
- *"A lot of coming forward with almost the pressure for us to take the time to listen to them. It is a lot. When I think of that that's what I see, is that whole pressure of trying to be the nice person and listen. Their beliefs, they push their beliefs on you a lot." (Female, Phoenix)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **Many/most respondents point out that this isn't true on an individual basis, but surely dominates their perceptions of Evangelical Christians as a whole.**
 - *"But individually I could not make that generalization at all. I've met many Evangelical Christians who are no different whatsoever from me in terms of morality or perspectives." (Male, Austin)*
- **These respondents also believe that Evangelical Christians base their religion and conversion efforts on negativity and fear.**
 - That their religion is more cult-like than others.
 - That it teaches absolute rightness and superiority.
 - That church is the center of life for members
 - That it leaves members little/no room for individuality or choice
 - And that it is a uniquely American community which has become a significant political force during recent years.

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **TV Ministries, Mega-Churches and high-profile preachers are closely associated with Evangelical Christians, and both play an important role in shaping the perceptions of Evangelicals among these respondents. Size, wealth, show, entertainment and constant conversion are among the most often cited descriptions.**
 - *“It seems like the evangelical churches have way too much money to be honest...I don't know what they're called but the ones on TV with the big giant churches and all. (Laughter.) They seem to reach giant, giant audiences. It's too much. It should be a little bit more grass roots.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“When I was in junior high, I think I was in sixth grade, I went to a Billy Graham concert. (Laughter.) That stadium was packed and that was Billy Graham. The thing wrapped up with making sure everybody gave ten percent. It was all a business pitch. I was a little kid and I was stressing about how am I going to get this money to this guy. (Laughter.)” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“They're very showy. They're definitely making a show perhaps to get people who are more likely to believe in that kind of show, people who are looking for a miracle, who are looking for something to have faith in. They put on that show for them. I think that they do a good job collecting a lot of people's money who are looking for that miracle.” (Female, Austin)*
 - *“I still think of what I see on TV. A lot of it is for show...It's all about the shows, the stadiums.” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“I always feel like their preachers are the dodgiest people on the face of the Earth. They always seem to be the people who are making all this money through their church, but then when they do any sort of expose on it, the money is staying with them and not going anywhere else. They're asking for millions of dollars from their followers, but they're just normal people who happen to rent out a large hall and get people to send more and more money in until they have millions.” (Female, Boston)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- *“Yes, the mega churches. That’s what they are. I put them with Evangelical. I put them in the same basket.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“I’ve seen them on TV. They’ll talk (makes sound) like that (laughs). “Come on to Jesus!” Then the put the hand on the head. “You’re born-again now!” The money starts passing and then behind the guy you can see him like, “My wallet is getting really big back here!” Like Scrooge McDuck swimming in it later on in the day.” (Female, Boston)*
- *“Very on TV, very call in donations. (Two respondents agreed.) I don’t know, they come across, they think they’re better than others.” (Female, Phoenix)*
- *“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, Phoenix)*
- *“I imagine the rock concert atmosphere at church with the Evangelicals, at least that’s what I’ve seen on TV...it’s fun for them...I think it is supposed to be (One respondent agreed.) I think it has to be fun or else you don’t go...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 word. That is what a lot of churches have had to do to bring in the younger crowd. (One respondent agreed.)” (Male, Phoenix)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **One Phoenix group talked about their greatest concerns about Evangelical Christianity.**
 - *“Being forced to share their viewpoints whether you believe it or not.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“The connection to politics and political parties.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“I feel like not everyone’s views are being taken into account.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“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 works for you doesn’t mean A, that’s it and B, that’s how it should be for everyone else.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*
 - *“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, Phoenix)*
 - *“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.” (Male, Phoenix)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **Several Austin respondents grouped Evangelical Christians together with Radical Muslims as the two religious groups they fear most and feel present the highest likelihood for doing bad things.**
 - *“As far as what scares me about groups of people in the world that have the potential to do harm, you have radical Muslim extremists and Evangelical Christians. Then there's a big drop off and you get into maybe military dictators, North Korea and Iran. Then you have everybody else slowly flowing down there. But from everything, and I watch the news all day every day at work, I read a lot, it's those groups that scare me more than a little, and want stuff to happen that I don't want to have happen.”*
- Both have power and are willing to use it to impose their view on the world
 - *“They have an awful lot of power and were using it in a way that I don't think any group should be using it. In terms of imposing their view of the world on the world, on everybody else. There's not other groups out there that are trying to impose their views, whether the majority of the people in the world would agree with that view or not, they're just out there imposing their view. Doing everything they can to impose that view and that's it. Just steamrolling over everybody. Again it's extreme and that's the radical people in the group, but they're just—to me have a scary amount of power.” (Male, Austin)*
- There is no talking to or reasoning with either of them.
 - *“It is like radical Muslims, there's no talking to them. Nothing is up for discussion. The reward that their promising, whether it's 72 virgins or sitting next to Jesus on a cloud forever in Heaven, you can't deny that it's there, unless you're dead. You find out or you don't find out until... there's this amazing reward being crafted for— whether it's 2,000 years or 1,300 years, this pay off, this reward that is so attractive and so desirable that it's the two most popular groups as far as following, and potentially influential, I think those two would be.”*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- Respondents readily offer improvement and temperance suggestions to address a few of the more objectionable elements of Evangelical Christian attitudes and behavior.
 - *"You don't have to say you can have gay marriage in the Evangelical church, but they can stop actively politicking for the abolition of gay marriage, for example among other things."*
 - *"I would think it needs to be really clear to me. I don't know a whole lot about it. I know a little bit about it but I don't know if mainstream Evangelicals believe that abortion doctors should be killed. I don't know if they believe that. Maybe. I don't know what percentage of them believe that. I don't know what percentage believe in the Rapture, for example. Things that seem pretty crazy to most people. If they could put some kind of a number on it, 'Well only a small percentage of active Evangelicals really believe in this kind of thing.' I would be like, 'Oh, okay. Well they're not all crazy.' That kind of thing. (Laughter.)...Maybe the church itself could make it a point to take some of these extreme actions and show the rest of us that this is not what they believe in, this is not what they agree with and the people who believe these things, 'We don't consider them part of our church because that's not what we believe as a religion.' If they don't do that then they, in a sense, condone it because people do it in their name." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"They're preaching ignorance. They want children to be not taught something just because that they're afraid that they might think that, 'Oh, maybe that's a point and what I've been taught in church is maybe not right.' Not necessarily their message but I want them to stop trying to silence others." (Male, Austin)*
 - *"If they want the door to be open a little it would be helpful if people had the impression that there was even the slightest chance that they would even alter their view on anything. (One respondent agreed.) I don't know what the point is of trying to have a discussion with somebody who are telling their point of view to convince you, and you know that there is no slightest change that they're going to shift their views." (Male, Austin)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- *"If you want to do conversion, that seems where a lot of the emphasis comes from because that's more in your face, as opposed to coming to my house or imposing your beliefs into me, post a notice up there. If I want to come, I'll come as opposed to you trying to teach me at my house, and tell me I am a dog in my house... if they put a poster up there, give me some information, I'll make the choice. that's how it should be, I think. " (Male, Austin)*
- *"Lead by example, do your social justice and I can see that," (Male, Austin)*
- *"I need to see compassion with the people that they disagree with." (Male, Austin)*
- *"Building a school in South America without building a church next to it. And do it because that's the right thing, not because it's also an opportunity to indoctrinate—" (Male, Austin)*
- *"Chill out. Take a deep breath and realize that you're no more special than anybody else." (Male, Boston)*
- *"Judge less and listen more." (Male, Boston)*
- *"My advice to the Evangelical Church is just to calm down. Please." (Male, Boston)*
- *"I think another element is that I think their listening skills could use some improvement...it's selective hearing." (Male, Boston)*
- **Many did say that they believe their perceptions of Evangelical Christians would be more interesting if more moderate members seized leadership/control of these churches and distanced themselves from the extreme actions/beliefs known to most today.**

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **Several respondents believe that the “Core Beliefs” document discussed during these groups added little of substance to better their understanding or improve their perceptions of Evangelical Christians.**
 - *“I feel like I have a lower opinion of them than when I came in, and I feel badly about that, because I... Hearing what their principles are, as opposed to what I see in action. I feel like they have a good concept, and I’m all for being really proud of who you are. Like I said, I’m a mouth Jewish broad, that’s who I am. My faith is my culture also, so I wear that openly, but not at the expense of anyone else. I feel like they wear everything... They wear their heart on their sleeve, “This is who we are, rah-rah,” with the banners, but it’s at the expense of everyone else. There’s this huge carnage around them that they don’t take responsibility for, they’re not aware of. They’re so busy cheering themselves on for being so great in what they’re doing, they don’t see the impact that it’s having. It’s different, I think, from the impact that is intended, because the intention is good, but to have some self-reflection as a group, and to say, “Is it worth it at any cost, and what is the cost?” At least acknowledge that there’s a cost, and what it is. Then they could say, “It’s worth it, because if we convert that one person...” I think that is some of the rhetoric you hear, but it doesn’t sit well with me.” (Female, San Francisco)*
- A former Evangelical Christian, however, described the document as a positioning manifesto for Evangelicals versus other Christians.
 - *“I read this differently because I come from this background. This isn’t about... This is internal. This definition is how Evangelical Christians see themselves compared with other Christians. It’s not about how they see themselves compared with the world. All these things specifically are responses to other types of Christianity... This is their identity. It’s a way to... who is in my group and who is out of my group. Other Christians who don’t believe in being born again like Catholics, that’s how they divide the groups. All these things are specific ideological. This is a manifesto basically. It has a lot of meaning if you know about Christianity or if you’re a Christian. I would say Evangelicals are probably even more interested in converting other Christians or as interested as...” (Male, San Francisco)*

End Of Group Feelings Towards Evangelical Christians

- **In the end most respondents openly reject Evangelical Christian beliefs as “not right for me”**
 - *“Personally, in my life, I don't have room for Evangelical beliefs. I'd like to say it's because I'm logical, but that in itself is a folly because according to Evangelical logic, they're still coming into their own beliefs. Logic is all interpreted. You can look at the same set of data and come up with different logical results. I have faith entirely in myself.” (Male, Boston)*
 - *“It's 180 degree difference with me and my beliefs. That's okay. It's unfortunate I think they try to push a lot on other people, but it is what it is. Everyone has to believe in their own thing, and if it makes them happy in this life to be all about the afterlife, then to each their own. I disagree with it. I think it's sad that they're consuming their whole entire life all about trying to do this unknown afterlife. Just enjoy the life you have now...Enjoying the life that we have now and the people around us and the nature and things around us that we have, we can see, we can touch, we can smell. They're removing themselves their entire lives from the now just obsessing about an unknown. It is or isn't. Just enjoy the now. I feel like they're missing out...We have the now. We have each other. We have the sense. We have the smell. I think you're gambling. You're gambling if you're putting it all onto something that is unknown...I feel like what Rebecca said about trying to do all these things for your afterlife to go to Heaven not Hell, and I think you should be in the here and now too, and be a good person and good things will happen. As good a person as you can. Everyone makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect. .. Life is what you make of it. You do bad things, you're going to end up in bad places. You steal, you lie, you cheat, things are going to happen. There are consequences to those things. You live a good life, you treat people right, and basically do the right thing, then I think that, yes, you're going to a good place...Treat those as you want to be treated and good things are going to happen. Stuff like that.” (Female, Boston)*
 - *“I will do just fine without them...I personally don't have any use for this at all in my life...It doesn't add any practical -- It doesn't add any value to me and it doesn't seem to be reflective of truth which is really what I'm mostly interested in. It's not based on empirical data. It doesn't have anything about it that I think is useful. ..It just seems dangerous...it's brainwashing people to a whole new level outside of what typical... I guess when you go back to Christianity it takes the insulation of certain belief systems and what you need to do with your life, follow to a whole another level which is just scary...It doesn't make sense...Why would you go against the cross and The Bible? If there's something to prove it that it's correct, then yes, I'll do it. If not, why even waste your time?...it's hard to accept.” (Male, San Francisco)*



Summary

Summary

- **Terminology**

Term	Reactions
Christianity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wide range of religions, beliefs and practices• All connected to Jesus and his teachings• Core beliefs are attractive, but many/most Christians don't practice• Confusion with which religions and real differences between them• Powerful, wealthy and influential...too much focus on money• Desires blind acceptance and conformity...discourages questions• Key levers are fear of death, unknown/unexplainable and hell• Respondents not into public worship• Many members use as a crutch...want to be told what to do• Criticize high profile religions and extreme/public recruitment efforts• Scandals hurt credibility of religion/leaders
Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactions depend on specific individual• Respondents try to avoid interacting with extremist religious recruiters• Many use religion as a crutch...want to be told what to think/how to act• Perception is they can do anything and be forgiven repeatedly• Most don't live in accordance with core beliefs of their religion



Summary



Term	Reactions
Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term associated with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Physical building/place and community that gathers there – Good work some do in time of need – Focus on money/wealth...question how spend – Institution and leaders – Recent scandals and efforts to cover them up • Negative childhood experienced drove non-practice decisions • Reactions differ based on specific religion & individual(s) leading service
Jesus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most believe he was a real person and a good man...not Son of God • Others feel myth or composite character and powerful symbol • Most support his teachings – love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness • Most believe message was his greatest contribution • Few respondents have any sort of personal relationship • Doubt virgin birth, resurrection, ascension, Messiah and miracles • Believe Bible includes only a small part of “Jesus Story” • Some feel Jesus may have been borrowed from other religions/cultures
Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book of stories • Likely undergone significant changes when translated/handed down • Selected writings of men...not Word of God to be taken literally • Writers may not have even known Jesus • Respondents question much what is said...especially in Old Testament • Many feel depicts men as superior to women

Summary

- **Objections**

Objection	Why Object
Intolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close minded, judgmental...my way or the highway attitude• Can't accept disagreement...willingly condemn those who do
Differences on social issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abortion, gay marriage, stem cells and birth control• Shouldn't try to legislate morality
Meddle in politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't pay taxes...shouldn't have political voice/power• Call for separation of church and state
Hypocrisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many/most don't practice core teachings themselves• Quick to tell others what they should do and judge failure
Inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male dominant religions• Prejudice against women and LGBTs
Different beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confession/forgiveness, evangelism requirements, divorce, premarital sex,, papal infallibility, LGBT condemnations, eternal damnation and Bible should be followed literally
Too much money focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everything costs...nothing is free for members• Spend on opulence and show instead of for those in need• Tithe (tax) members...but don't pay taxes



Summary



Objection	Why Object
Not relevant today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow/no evolve/improve • Ignoring environment • Manages members with fear, intimidation and threat
Key concepts not plausible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redemption, Original sin, virgin birth, miracles, resurrection, ascension, Son of God, Word of God
Parents pushed too much	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forced church attendance on children...no choice • It was boring and didn't make sense to me • Questions and doubts discouraged
Can't be myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't believe God requires public worship or intermediary • No room for thought and individual conscience
Too extreme for me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hell and Original Sin are inconsistent with Jesus teachings • Indoctrinating kids for life
No proof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on faith, not logic/fact/common sense • Don't know what happens after death
Deny science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability of some to accept basic science and nature • Fight to block evolution, global warming, natural selection, etc. in public schools and replace with religion POV.

Summary

- **Core Beliefs**

Belief	Reactions
Conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Part of all religions...conversion itself not offensive• Extreme experiences of most respondents universally rejected• Really attractive if takes place in 20's and decision is respected• "Born Again" acceptance is push back from many• Respondents believe Jesus' message more important than Born Again
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public evangelizing in hopes of informing and converting non-believers• Many open to being informed but only if and when they request it• Aggressive convincing and converting methods rejected• Respondents question meaning of "social justice"• Many feel inconsistent with Evangelicals and strict adherence to Bible• Many criticize Evangelicals for advertising their good works
The Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most can't accept The Bible as the truth and ultimate authority• Believe Bible is book of stories written by men, not Word of God• Can't support literal interpretation
The Cross	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long time symbol of many religions throughout history• Cross is morbid for some, but not offensive• Graphic executions of crucifix with body of Jesus offends some• Respondents push back at Cross as symbol of redemption of humanity



Summary

- **Evangelical Christians**

Closing Comments

- Passionate and outspoken believers enjoying a high profile in America today
- Described as believing in spreading their word much more than other religions, doing so in obnoxious and unacceptable ways and incapable of or unwilling to accept/respect different beliefs from others.
- The visible and outspoken of the Evangelicals have earned for their entire group a reputation as the most distasteful of distasteful groups.
- Many/most respondents point out that this isn't true on an individual basis, but surely dominates their perceptions of Evangelical Christians as a whole.
- TV Ministries, Mega-Churches and high-profile preachers are closely associated with Evangelical Christians, and both play an important role in shaping the perceptions of Evangelicals among these respondents. Size, wealth, show, entertainment and constant conversion are among the most often cited descriptions.
- Several respondents believe that the "Core Beliefs" document discussed during these groups added little of substance to better their understanding or improve their perceptions of Evangelical Christians.
- In the end most respondents openly reject Evangelical Christian beliefs as "not right for me"

