

Objections to Christianity

Group 3

5/21/2013 5:00 PM

Boston MA

(0:00:00.1 - 0:01:25.9) TELL ME YOUR NAME, A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU, YOUR FAMILY UNIT, WHAT YOU DO.

James: No parakeets. *(Laughter.)* No kids. Single. I'm from around here. I grew up around here. By education, I'm a landscape architect. Currently, I'm not working. I'm taking the year off.

(0:02:13.1) DO YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS OR DO YOU NOT DO YOUR OWN YARD?

James: I don't do my own yard. *(Laughter.)*

Lee: I live with my husband in the South End neighborhood here in Boston. We live really close by. No kids or nothing crazy otherwise at home. I am a musician by training. For my bread and butter job, I run the main information desk at Berkeley College of Music.

Eugene: I live at home with my wife. We just had a baby. *(Several respondents congratulate him.)* Thank you, thank you. It's nice and quiet in here. *(Laughter.)* We have a dog. There you go, we're dog people. I am a high school history teacher.

Brian: I am a musician. I just graduated with my masters. I'm currently looking for a job. I graduated with my masters in opera, and I'll probably be doing that on the side, but I also do graphic design and communication. Looking into hopefully getting into that. Not married. *(Laughter.)* I'm from Texas. That's about it.

(0:03:57.2) WHAT BROUGHT YOU UP HERE? WAS IT SCHOOL?

Brian: What brought me here? Yes. I came here for school. It's a lot colder.

Patrick: I live in Waltham. I'm trained as a computer animation animator. I'm currently working as a data analyst.

Kir: I am a musician as well. I'm in a band called Three Day Threshold. That's my passion. I have a day job as well. I work at Northeastern University in operations. I just had a baby myself.

Tony: I'm a paralegal. I do writing and blogging on the side as a hobby. I was born in Boston, single, and I live in Bay Village, which is two blocks, right there.

(0:05:04.5) DID YOU WALK TONIGHT?

Tony: Yes.

Corey: I live in East Walpole with my wife and two boys. I work for a mutual fund company here in Boston. Not much else.

(0:05:32.9 - 0:06:17.5) TODAY WE'RE GOING TO BE TALKING ABOUT CHRISTIANITY. WHAT'S THE FIRST THING THAT COMES INTO YOUR HEAD?

Lee: My mind tends to jump to the extreme. I think that Christianity in itself fundamentally ought to be or 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 has vowed not to let him or me into the house because she's worried that the homosexuality spirit will somehow make its way in there and influence her children. I'm completely serious.

Male respondent: It's like you have a cold.

Lee: Yes, exactly. They're going to catch the gays, I guess. *(Laughter.)*

(0:07:04.5) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS?

Lee: I think there's a part of me that wants to be joyful or happier, but my honest, gut reaction is more the reticence. I don't necessarily want to say fear, but it's more like, what are you trying to peddle me? What is this about? What are we going to get into?

Eugene: I find that people who observe religion and are super religious, they always have an opinion. 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 let you finish in general. They don't want to hear it, but they want you to hear them. I see that a lot. Very heated discussions.

Brian: I'm thinking "Oh, fun. This should be interesting." I really love discussing religion. I grew up in a very religious . . . They're Seventh Day Adventists, I don't know if anyone here has heard of it. Keene, Texas, which is a little Adventist town. It's very, very conservative. I didn't have that bad of an experience, but I find it interesting to talk about it.

(0:08:27.7) WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

Eugene: How little of the . . . and I know because I'm a history teacher, I teach it, it's part of the curriculum, but 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.

(0:09:07.6) SHOULD WE TAKE ON CHRISTIANITY FIRST?

Male respondent: Yes. *(All respondents agree.)*

(0:09:13.6) TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF OR ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY IN GENERAL?

Lee: 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 versus the . . .

(0:10:29.5) THE LOVING ONE?

Lee: Exactly, the loving one versus the more extremist one, I would say.

Patrick: I was raised Irish Catholic instead of Roman Catholic because we believed in more guilt than actual God. (*Laughter.*) I was very dedicated to the church. It provided a social outlet, it provided community. It was good. Then 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.

(0:11:30.9) DEFINE HOSTILITY?

Patrick: It's not necessarily overt. Not getting invited to church outings, our family saying, "Oh, you can come, but please don't bring Patrick." Stuff like that. This was Watertown in the eighties. This was like, "What the hell is going on?" That caused me to back away. I also have family experience with extremes both on the right and the left, playing religion off as a way to condemn someone's lifestyle. It always comes down to that, in one form or another. It's so difficult to have discussion with family members on either side. Christianity, I see the message it puts out. Some of the messages are great. Some of the messages that it puts out are not so great.

Tony: I have a different point of view. I'm Jewish. People have always approached me, regardless of what particular branch of Christianity it is, it's more like, being a Jew, I have a question on this. I've always run into an, "Oh, yes, I can answer that to the best of my abilities." There's never been a sense of, "Oh, you're a Jew? Are you poisoning my water well? Are you stealing my babies to make your matzah?" There's never been that sort of anti-Semitism behind it, but it's always been sort of like, "Oh yes, I'd be glad to have a conversation with you." It's always been more civil.

Lee: If I can further what they're saying a little bit, too, my initial reaction regarding Christianity would have a little bit less recoiling if dissent was encouraged more often. Not so much as a means to necessarily challenge the authority, although it could be that, but it's more of a means to have a greater understanding. You have a conversation with somebody, you ask questions, because you're trying to reconcile your own reality with what their reality is, and you meet somewhere in the middle. A lot of

Christianity that I've come across does not seem to be very encouraging of that. 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 looked down upon, I feel is the general attitude.

James: My experience growing up, I went to church all through my childhood. Sunday school, confirmation, (0:14:25.3 *inaudible/muffled*) 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. I remember growing up my whole life in the churches and Sunday school and watching everyone sing the songs. They knew every word without even looking at the Bible. They were doing everything routine, it was always the same. It made me very uncomfortable. One thing I experienced every other day, and it actually happened today, is when someone sneezes, everybody automatically, I think it's brainwashed, everyone automatically says, "Oh bless you, God bless you." I don't believe in God, Jesus, or the devil, heaven or hell. When someone sneezes around me and I don't say anything, because I never do, they either have a negative reaction or they just give you a look. They're waiting for it, and I won't do it. I experience that a lot.

Lee: That's true. You've got to do *gesundheit*. (0:15:27.1 *Inaudible/crosstalk*.)

Kir: I just see it as a business. Think about it, it's the oldest, most continuous running business. You pay for everything when you go to a church. My wife, her family, they're Greek Orthodox. They're very, you know, to the point that it's ridiculous. You can't have a reasonable . . . You can't reason with them. Her parents are (0:15:52.7 *unclear/whisper*) so it's a little bit different. It's ridiculous. But you can't have a reasonable conversation about religion with them. It's either this is the way things work and you believe it, or you're going to hell. Something like that. We got married, we had our kids baptized in an orthodox way because I didn't care. 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 respondent: They're their own conglomerate. They're separate from everything. It's like a fortress. No getting in. It's very strict. They do have movies and television throughout the years that feed you what they think it is. People automatically say, "It's a movie. I believe in it." You know what I mean? I also think of stuff like the Bible. I could be wrong with this, but the Bible's own history, wasn't it written by men only? Think about that. Women suppressed throughout history. I was like, "You're going to believe everything in the Bible when only men wrote it?"

(0:17:20.5) WHAT IS THE IMAGE THAT COMES INTO YOUR MIND WHEN I SAY CHRISTIANS?

Brian: In this country? Fundamentalists. Evangelicals. (Two respondents agreed.)

Corey: 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.

(0:17:56.4) YOU THINK ABOUT ONE OF THE ORGANIZED GROUP BY BRAND?

Male respondent: I think the biggest problem with Christianity is, like we all just said, the extremists, because they get the face time. *(Multiple respondents agree.)* That's what you see on Fox News.

Male Respondent: That's the person that *(0:18:22.1 inaudible/crosstalk)*.

Corey: That's what you see on any news. Or the televangelists, trying to make money. They're all under that.

(0:18:29.8) THOSE ARE THE ONES YOU THINK ABOUT FIRST?

Corey: Yes. You don't hear about—I've heard these horror stories . . . I went to a Catholic college. The head of the religious department was a rabbi. The biggest parties on campus were the priests. They were very laid back. One of my best friends from college got married at the school, and the priests had no problem. Her husband was a Protestant. He had no problem giving the Holy Ghost, the wafer, to anybody who wanted it, whether they were Roman Catholic or not. My mother, who was there because I was in the wedding party, she was aghast by that. "I can't believe he's giving that to a Protestant!" But you don't hear about them because they don't make the face time. They don't make the headlines.

Eugene: It doesn't do service to the bigger umbrella of Christianity, too, because the visual is of a hypocrite, if you will. I'm going to use the people in the Republican party, because I think that everyone in the Republican party is exactly what we're trying to say *(0:19:54.0 unclear)* here. Small government, small government, small government don't micromanage me, but I'm going to get your uterus as small as it can get. I'm going to make stupid a** science comments based on religion. I look at them and go, "Are you kidding me? How uneducated are you?" Those are the people you're associating with in both politics and religion. You begin to say, "If they're like that and they get the face time, then everyone must be like that."

Brian: I know it's hard, and I always battle with this question, but shouldn't we as people, I feel like I'm smart enough to realize that these are just a small sample of people, at least that's what I try to do. When I think of Christians, I try to think that there's a lot. I've met people who are extremists. I've met people who are extremely liberal. I've met people in the middle. I don't know. I'd like to think that most of us realize that those aren't . . .

Lee: I think everyone in the room knows that . . .

Brian: No, I'm not saying like—as my personal, think about the average idiot out there who doesn't—

Lee: That's what jumps into our minds first.

Eugene: Yes, and that's just it. Everybody who talked here, I bet we're all college educated. I don't want to say all of us, but some of us have beyond college educations. The average American is not college educated. College education equates to 25 percent of the population. Seventy-five percent have not gone to college. The vast majority are idiots. They probably don't think about it. The loudest person comes to dominate the conversation.

(0:21:47.0) WHO ARE THE DOMINATING CHRISTIAN PERSONALITIES THAT YOU HEAR AND SEE IN THE MEDIA?

Kir: Pat Robertson, Fred Phelps, James Austin, *(0:21:58.9 inaudible/laughter)*.

Tony: It's the bad thing you said, too, the Westboro Baptist Church protesting soldiers' funerals. You don't see nuns running orphanages on TV because it's not really newsworthy.

James: I'd even say it's the other way. I'm going to throw Reverend Al Sharpton in there. When was the last time he did anything reverend-ish? You have it that way too.

(0:22:27.7) IS HE A CHRISTIAN?

James: I'm sure he says he is. I think he's under the umbrella of Christianity—I would think.

Brian: All this talk has come up more and more during the election years too. It's an overload, then afterwards it kind of dies down a little bit. You feel obligated . . .

Eugene: We're still going. Massachusetts feels like it's constantly in election cycle. Senators leaving.

Male respondent: The mayor. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

(0:22:55.6) TELL ME ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE YOU HAD WITH CHRISTIANS OR A CHRISTIAN?

Kir: Every year I go out to Madison, Wisconsin. I volunteer with my fiancée's mother. They run a soup kitchen. It's excellent. The community there is excellent. I don't necessarily agree with their beliefs, or what the conditions are that they're setting in order for people to come and have free food. But they're trying. It's a good community event.

(0:23:42.4) ARE THERE CONDITIONS ABOUT FAITH FOR FOOD?

Kir: Yes, faith for food. That really rubs me the wrong way. The thought is that they're trying. It's a really small, tight-knit community. I think the congregation is maybe fifteen, twenty people. But they try. They're listed up there as the second most popular food kitchen in Madison. It's a positive experience. It's a good community.

Brian: I was going to talk about one, but I'll talk about the other. Growing up, I grew up in an Adventist church, but the churches that I generally attended had a lot of young people. What I've noticed, I worked at a church . . . I work as a singer, and I got hired for a choir at a church on Sundays. Whenever I go to the church that I go to, there's maybe two people under thirty, and the rest are above sixty or seventy. It's quite interesting to me to see that the older people get, the more they tend to go towards a religion. When people are younger, they tend to go away. That was interesting. That's been my experience.

Lee: I lived in Italy for a while, in Florence. People there were sort of . . . Whenever you'd have a question, or, "Oh, come to church, we know you're not into it but come and check it out. We'll explain

what's going on." Very open and friendly and take what you want, don't take what you want. You never see that in this country. Nuns waiting for the bus. It's so much more seamless there than here. If you see a nun walking down the street in full habit here, you're like, "Oh, that's a bit odd." (*Laughter.*) "I'm going to have to tell someone about that because that is so odd." But you see a nun on a scooter, just scooting around, it's like, "Okay, it's just a person on a scooter."

Corey: You wouldn't look twice.

Lee: Exactly, exactly.

Corey: A year ago, I was walking through the Financial District on a Saturday, and a group of young teenagers, they were definitely young teenagers, they came up to me, and they're like, "Can I talk to you for a second?" I thought they were going to ask for directions or something, and they said, "We're recruiting for our local church." They tried to give me a flyer. In my mind, I was so blown away. It's almost like the army, recruiting. They're sending out groups of young kids to pick up people off the street. It blew my mind. I also think of things like every time you go to a hotel or a motel, there's a Bible in every drawer. I don't know what to think about stuff like that.

(0:26:41.0) WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE BIBLE IN EVERY DRAWER, HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

Corey: Personally, I don't like it. It makes me uncomfortable because I remember growing up, going to church and stuff like that. There would be little sections and stuff like that. I remember over the years, I would talk to priests and nuns and people in the church like, "Oh, did you read the whole Bible?" Because even though I don't believe in it, I read half the Bible when I was a kid, I was like, "I'm going to get this, it's going to click in, I'm going to know it, I'm going to believe in it." Not once did any of them ever say, "I read the whole Bible." I was like, it's almost like if you're a schoolteacher and you're teaching certain subjects, shouldn't you know? I just don't understand why. I think it's being forced, that's what I'm trying to say, with the Bible in the hotel/motel drawers. I think it's almost like they're forcing it on you.

Kir: I'm listening; they're good stories. My experiences with Christianity, I kind of agree with you. It seems like there's a lot more old people. I feel like when I was younger, it was more of a wider thing. 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. (*One respondent agreed.*) Gay marriage, women priests. My uncle was a Jesuit priest; he got excommunicated because he got married. He's still my uncle, I love the guy. There's nothing wrong with him in my eyes. They're a great couple. These things that are, to me . . . It doesn't make sense. Why is this the case? I work, at my day job, to help do events for Northeastern's branch of the Catholic center. I get along well, I'm a firm believer in my own version of God. It's kind of funny. I got in an argument with a priest one day a few weeks ago. I'm like, "Hold on. I'm arguing with a priest about God." (*Laughter.*) I'm not going to win this argument, I'm not going to change this guy's mind. I'm like, okay, whatever, Father. (*0:29:13.5 Inaudible/laughter and crosstalk.*)

Male respondent: That would actually be exciting.

Brian: Don't you think in the current times, the Bible, you can't relate it to current events? It doesn't connect. It's so old and outdated. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Eugene: People still believe that everything that was written in the Bible two thousand years ago is still relevant today. I mean, look around you. Nothing else is the same as it was two thousand 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. *(Laughter.)* So they looked at people who were eating what, and they were dying. They're like, "Maybe we shouldn't eat this." *(Laughter.)* But we have refrigeration now.

Lee: There's context.

Eugene: Exactly.

Lee: That is really lost in all of the religions today. Religion has the potential to have an awesome community. But the fact that nothing seems to be updated really just throws a wrench in the whole thing to a degree.

(0:30:22.1) THIS FROM AN ANIMATOR.

Lee: Yes. *(Laughter.)* Part of the problem lies in that it hasn't been updated, but religion is completely based on tradition. How can you have a whole theory based on a dying tradition and then have to update it?

Eugene: But you can have conversations. I think certain branches of Christianity aren't. I know in Judaism, at our temple, all the time there's always, "Are you in an interfaith marriage? Or having interfaith talking? How are you raising your kids? We're talking about if you want to raise them both ways . . ."

(0:30:55.6) THAT'S THE ELEMENT OF UPDATE, BUT IT'S STILL VERY OLD.

Eugene: It is, but the conversation is, if you want to pick and choose in Judaism, how are you going to come to that? You know it's taking . . . what are you going to apply to the modern world? The practice itself is still really old, but they're at least willing to have a conversation about not everything fits in a modern world for you, so how do you be the best Jew you can be in this particular situation in 2013?

(0:31:32.5) WHEN I SAY JESUS, YOU THINK—

Male Respondent: Myth.

(0:31:40.9) MYTH?

Corey: He seems like a great guy.

Eugene: Middle Easterner.

Patrick: Kind of like King Arthur. A bit fact, a bit fiction.

Eugene: 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 they come to combat Islam.

(0:32:44.6) HE WAS A MIDDLE EASTERNER WHO ACTUALLY DREW BREATH?

Eugene: Oh, absolutely. Yes. He was a guy and 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 have been found.

(0:33:11.9) WE ALL HAD OPINIONS BEFORE THE FACTS WERE SHARED.

Eugene: Sorry, that's what I do. *(Laughter.)*

Tony: From what I understand, Jesus the man wanted to branch out and teach his or another form of Judaism outside of the community, and was kicked out. Then, after many years of teaching, was somewhat invited back in, and then it just gets muddled. To your point, taking a Middle Eastern man and making him the white savior of your entire religion really just screws everything up.

(0:33:51.2) WHERE DID YOU GET THE WHITE SAVIOR PART?

Tony: Before the Renaissance and in the Renaissance, there is such an absence of him being portrayed as his birthright. He's always white.

(0:34:13.2) THE ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF HIM?

Tony: Yes. He's always white. He's always European. He always has European structure. Then after the Renaissance, and getting in towards modern times, every adaptation of him is more white, more European. Both in facial structure, behavior, the imagery of him is being distorted.

Eugene: Have you not seen the people in Boston Commons saying he's African? *(Laughter.)*

Kir: Did the continents move in some way that we're just not aware of in the last couple of years? *(Laughter.)*

Eugene: But along those same lines, I tell my students, and I have good, intelligent students, and they go "Oh, Mr. Schultz, that kid is Asian." And I'm like, "Oh really? He doesn't look Russian to me." And they're like, "Wait, what?" There is that sort of, if you're Asian, you can only be Chinese or Japanese or Korean or Vietnamese, forgetting the fact that you can be Arabian, Indian. The -stans are Caucasian. They come from the Caucasus Mountains. Exactly. You don't get any more Caucasian than from the Caucasus Mountains. *(Laughter.)*

Patrick: As a history teacher, do you find that a lot of history books are sort of outdated and not current, and they're teaching stuff that isn't . . .

Eugene: I have to be honest, my school, two years ago, we did an exhaustive search where we got new textbooks. We've got the newest textbooks out there. They're actually, because I teach ancient world, I always say, "Guys, we're looking at Christianity from the historical context. You are free to believe what you want to believe." I do that too, because we talked about Homo habilis and Neanderthal, and I might say, "If you want to believe in the seven days, believe in the seven days. Just for the sake of this class, this is how I'm presenting it. Feel free to go there." But the textbooks that we use are really, they're really pretty good. The textbook that we have now even says, "Listen, as the early Christians went out into the Roman cities where they would prosper, preaching to the poor, they changed the story, which is one of the reasons why Pontius Pilate wipes his hand. You can't convert people who you are also blaming for killing Jesus." Right from the beginning, they're opting the story. It's one of the reasons why I suggested we go with that textbook. You never see that.

(0:36:54.1) WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ARE SAID ABOUT JESUS? WHAT HAS BEEN POSED AS PART OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF SYSTEM?

Brian: His birthday is a little overcommercialized. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: In the wrong part of the year.

Tony: Everywhere you turn, you see him on a crucifix.

Brian: *(0:37:22.5 Inaudible/muffled).* He's good, love. You hear a lot about that.

Male Respondent: Sacrifice. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

(0:37:31.8) AND HE WAS BORN?

Male Respondent: On Christmas. *(Laughter)*

Eugene: Of a virgin. *(Laughter.)*

Brian: He was born to repent our sins.

Lee: It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

(0:37:52.1) TELL ME A LITTLE MORE.

Lee: I mean, who really believes that? It's impossible. I don't buy it.

Kir: Maybe the history teacher can back me up a little bit on this, but from what I understand, the virgin birth story is an example of an adaptation of earlier cultures. If you look at Egyptian cultures, there's the story of a virgin birth in there somewhere, and if you look at it even further . . .

Eugene: (0:38:17.7 *Unclear*) has the virgin birth, yes.

Tony: Pre-Islam has a few virgin births.

(0:38:28.9) DO ANY OF YOU BELIEVE THE VIRGIN BIRTH?

Eugene: Christianity is a mix of earlier religions. (*One respondent agreed.*) If you look at the whole story, so Joseph is forty-some odd years old. He gets this really young bride and they don't ever really define what young is. Could be twelve, could be eighteen. He goes, "Oh, you're so hot. I love you." And she's kind of like, "Oh, you're old." He says, "I'm going to put you in this house, and then I'm going to go off and make a whole bunch of money for us. I'm going to be gone for a really long time, and you're really attractive, so don't do anything until I come back." If you're looking at it in terms of . . .

(0:39:09.6) SO YOU'RE SAYING SHE GOT PREGNANT WHEN HE WAS OUT MAKING MONEY?

Eugene: Most likely. (*Laughter.*)

(0:39:17.3) THERE'S ALSO THE RESURRECTION.

Patrick: Once again, an Egyptian adaptation.

Tony: Also, Jesus was not a zombie, he was a lich. (*Laughter.*) Liches can contain their soul in an outside object, so that when the soul returns, he can inhabit his own body. When he was resurrected, he was not a zombie. He did not actually walk out of the cave, he was a lich.

Male Respondent: Alien.

Male Respondent: I never hear that distinction—

Male Respondent: I was just going to say that, I was going to throw that out there.

Eugene: Not saying it's aliens.

Tony: Liches could be taken from Dungeons and Dragons or anything, really.

Eugene: I actually think he went in the cave to come to North America. (*Laughter.*) So the Mormon story could be true.

(0:40:08.0) TELL ME OTHER ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE?

Lee: Judgmental.

(0:40:36.7) THEY'RE JUDGMENTAL IN THAT?

Lee: 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.

(0:41:01.3) THEY'RE JUDGMENTAL; GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE.

Corey: If you don't believe in what they believe . . .

Lee: Yes. You have to believe what they believe or . . .

Brian: As human beings, it's our nature to judge. We judge whether you like it or not. We're always judging. I guess sometimes, if there's a book telling you that it's okay, sort of, you have to take it a little further.

Eugene: Their inability to accept basic science. I'm not saying higher science, but basic science. Basic biology. Basic beliefs.

(0:41:41.7) WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT BASIC BIOLOGY, GIVE ME THE SHORT LIST.

Eugene: Reproduction. Evolution.

(0:41:48.3) DO YOU MEAN THE VIRGIN OR ABORTIONS?

Kir: Reproduction in general.

Eugene: Reproduction in general.

Kir: There's chemicals that the female body secretes to prevent pregnancy.

Eugene: Yes, don't be stupid. See, Tony said the Big Bang.

Tony: Big Bang Theory.

Eugene: 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.

(0:42:38.8) GIVE ME ANOTHER ONE.

Male Respondent: I disagree with that last part. *(Laughter)*

Tony: You ever watch the series on the History Channel called *Ancient Aliens*?

Eugene: All the time.

Tony: That's my favorite series. What I love about that show is that they base it off of actual facts. They have proof that blows my mind when it comes to religion.

Eugene: The Greek guy is awesome. *(Laughter.)*

(0:42:59.7) WHAT ELEMENTS OF RELIGION DO YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE? NOW I HAVE TO WATCH THAT SHOW.

Tony: It's been on for a few years now.

Lee: As it was kind of mentioned earlier, I think another element is that I think their listening skills could use some improvement.

Eugene: They have selective hearing.

Lee: It's selective hearing, yes.

(0:43:17.5) I HEARD SOMEBODY SAY HYPOCRISY EARLIER.

James: Overbearing.

(0:43:36.4) OVERBEARING HOW?

James: Overbearing in that my mother used to drag me to church every g** d*** Sunday, and no matter where we were. On vacation, anything. We always had to go to church. If we didn't go to church, it was a sin. As soon as I was old enough to drive myself to church, I didn't drive myself to church every Sunday.

Eugene: I don't know if you need to put it up there, but 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?"

Lee: There's also no Limbo anymore.

Eugene: Yes.

Lee: I'm like, where did all the dead babies go? *(Laughter.)* They don't talk about those things in church.

Patrick: I haven't gone to church for twenty-whatever years, but it was always the same, like you said before. It's the same thing. Every week, every week. I could recite 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.

Brian: Yes, nobody questions anything.

Eugene: Not being able to evolve is a problem. Unquestioning.

Brian: But that's why there's other religions. That's how they came to be, because of questioning. They created something else.

Kir: The individualization, too. I feel like there's this cookie cutter mold that Christianity, certain aspects of it, you have to follow this, it's your rule book. It's your rules. These are your policies. Different people have different needs, obviously, for individualization.

Eugene: There's a reason that the word is called Puritanical.

Lee: Can I add ego to that list too?

(0:45:32.1) YOU MAY.

Lee: I mean ego in the context of, for example, if you look at a lot of the big megachurches, 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, admittedly stained glass windows, and these wonderful decorations in churches that must have cost twenty million, easy, to build, serve the purpose of religion. Getting people to worship there any better.

Eugene: Anything after 1600 should not have any of that.

(0:46:15.9) ARE THERE ARE OTHER ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE AND WHY?

James: God wills it. That needs to stop.

Corey: That needs to stop in every religion.

(0:46:35.6) THE DEFAULT "GOD WILL IT"?

James: Yes. 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.

Brian: 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.

Eugene: I think along the same lines, and this is true across the board, more moderate religions would speak up.

(0:47:19.8) TELL ME ABOUT MODERATE RELIGIONS?

Lee: The one issue with that, and I agree with you 100 percent, the only issue with that is that it's difficult to be a passionate moderate. If you're a moderate, a lot of what contributes to being a moderate is that you're kind of in the middle on a lot of the issues. You don't have strong feelings on a lot of the topics. But I agree with you 100 percent.

Kir: The Christian Science Center in Boston, we went there on a school trip in high school. I didn't know that you could be a hardcore geneticist but still have faith in a higher power. It still makes my head hurt.

But that's the kind of moderates that need to speak out. Sadly, the moderates in that kind of situation are so politically tied to one side or the other that they can't speak out. They can't create that common ground. We're stuck between these two streets.

(0:48:21.3) A RECENT NATIONAL STUDY FOUND REASONS WHY PEOPLE COULDN'T ACCEPT CHRISTIANITY. THERE ARE A LOT WE HAVEN'T BROUGHT UP AND I'M WONDERING WHY?

Tony: That's good though, right? A different perspective?

(0:48:50.2) I REALLY LIKE THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, JUDGMENTAL. JUDGMENTAL IN WHAT WAY?

Lee: They're like, "Oh, gays can't get married."

Brian: Women can't be priests.

Eugene: Women can't be in control of their own body, even if it puts their lives at risk.

Lee: That's the judgmental. When people say, "Why are you doing it that way?" "Why don't you believe this?" I had an argument with my neighbor. He came over and said, "I'm a practicing Muslim; do I threaten you?" "No. It doesn't matter if our lives intersect or not, if you're happy with your choice, cool." I don't see why sixteen people on the same block can't be and do whatever the hell they want. I don't see what the problem is with that.

(0:49:54.1) THE PROBLEM SEEMS TO BE RAISED BY CHRISTIANS?

Corey: It can be translated across the board, but in different extremes.

Eugene: Again, I'm going to bring a historical aspect to it. Especially in this region, Massachusetts was founded by people running away from England because it wasn't religious enough. It was too Roman Catholic-y for their liking. So religion and the foundation of this country, even though we say there's a separation of church and state, we've done a good job. There's still that underlying level of religion that plays a part, whether we like it or not, in how this country runs. When you have people in positions of government who step up and say, "Hey, I represent people from, and I'm not going to say Texas, but people who come from Texas, you know, Texas, there are certain people in Texas who believe X. Now I have my national platform to talk about X." Now we here in Massachusetts do not influence how the people in Texas vote. The people in Texas do not influence how the people in Iowa vote, and so on and so forth. But you still have to sit back and be presented with that material. I don't give two craps what Lee and his husband do, because I'm doing my own thing. But in other parts of the country, they look at Lee and his husband, and they go, "Oh." But they have someone who is able to vocalize that message. We have to get to the point where you're not even in the same seat. Just shush, move along. Do something more important.

(0:51:52.3) YOUR CONCERN IS ABOUT THE POLITICIZATION?

Eugene: Of religion, yes. Yes.

(0:51:58.0) WHAT HAPPENS WHEN POLITICS AND RELIGION SEEMS TO MIX?

Eugene: Stupidity. The person from Missouri, what was his name? He was going to win and then he opened his mouth.

Corey: The wind farmer?

Eugene: Yes.

Male respondent: I can't (0:52:16.1 *Inaudible/crosstalk.*)

Male respondent: He said something so incredibly dumb.

Corey: Wind farms shouldn't be built because they'll slow down the wind. I can't remember his name.

Eugene: It's on both sides, the guy who was questioning the navy. Should we build more bases in Guam, because the island will capsize.

(0:52:36.6) THAT WAS A CHRISTIAN'S STATEMENT?

Eugene: Yes. A Democrat out of Virginia or Mississippi?

(0:52:45.7) YES, BUT WAS HE MAKING A STATEMENT FOR CHRISTIANS?

Eugene: Yes. He said we have to keep in mind the people on Guam, because we would be doing them a disservice in terms of our charity. It was those sorts of buzzwords. If we continue to build bases, Guam will capsize, and that will reflect poorly on where we end up. It was messy. Something else happened so that got a blip.

(0:53:13.3) WHEN DO YOU KNOW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS PUSHING AN AGENDA THROUGH A POLITICAL, INDIVIDUAL PARTY PLATFORM?

Brian: When they support a politician.

Eugene: Well, not just that, but that's a classic case of it. I think you see that more down South, because religion is more prevalent down there. You don't see that too much in Massachusetts, but maybe in Texas, Missouri, wherever that people are more religious. That there are more Evangelicals that come out and vote. The politicians cling to that so that they can get the 51 percent and get reelected.

Lee: And they always say at the end of every speech, "God bless America."

Eugene: Exactly, they're always harping on about that.

(0:53:54.6) LET ME PLAY DEVIL'S ADVOCATE. DOESN'T GLAD SUPPORT SOME OF OUR LEGISLATORS?

Lee: The difference between those and some of the others down South doing that is that these are churches and religious organizations doing that. GLAD is an explicitly political organization. They are

meant to actually endorse politicians because they believe that these particular legislators will push an agenda through that they support. The difference in religion, when you're talking about religion, is not as much. Maybe that is the agenda, but we're supporting these because they go most closely along with our beliefs. I can see where you're getting that similarity, but basically the difference is that GLAD is a blatantly political organization in the sense that they don't try to hide it.

(0:54:51.7) YOU'RE SAYING CHURCHES SHOULDN'T BE ACTIVELY POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Lee: No, I don't see how that's right.

Eugene: What it does is when religion becomes more politicized, it drives both sides to the extreme. It goes back to our moderates. You either have to be . . . For myself, I consider myself what is called a typical Northeast republican. I am extremely fiscal conservative, but I am socially liberal because I don't care when it comes to the social issues. Do what you want, do what you want, do what you want, because until it affects me, who cares? But mess with my money, stab a b****. *(Laughter.)* No, I'm kidding.

Brian: But what you had just said, In God We Trust is on money . . .

Eugene: But again, historically, that goes back to where it was. But as both sides push to the extreme, it leaves a lot of people, and a lot of my friends I feel are in this same boat. I don't really want to move to those poles, but really, my options are drying up. I have to pick an extreme or else I'm left out, and then where do I fit in?

Kir: I went to college in Savannah, Georgia, and I love Savannah. I was born and raised here in Boston, so going down there was a complete culture switch.

Eugene: Because it was warm? *(Laughter.)*

Kir: It was warm, and there were certain words you couldn't say in public. But what I found was that on an individual level, from the Evangelicals to the Orthodox Jews, was that everybody was very intelligent. But when it came time to translate from that individual sense of "I'm free to talk about my religion and change my views" to the politicians that will take that 2 percent of Evangelicals and kind of calling the vote. The moment that God mentality kicks in, there's really no stopping it. In my six years there, I saw three riots, two of which were church versus church. In my mind, they were the same church, but one of them decided that they were going to support what was thought of as the very minute gay community, but in truth, was a massive gay community that was kind of told to sit in the corner. Everybody I spoke to, all over Georgia, was very intelligent, came to their own decisions, most of them had . . . like live and let live. If they're happy that way, great. But the minute that the mob mentality, that my representative is saying, "This is my Evangelical view" yadah, yadah, I'm an Evangelical, so I have to if I want to stay in that community. Especially in the South, in the country. That sense of community is extremely important. Not so much up here, not so much in . . . A little bit in Chicago, a little bit in the Midwest, but the more you get into the country where there's more cows than people, the Midwest. Cities are still a hub of intellectual curiosity. The more you move away from the cities towards the United Peninsula,

Sturgeon Bay, you really start seeing these tight-knit communities that are individual, very intelligent, very reasonable people. As a mob, just don't go over well.

Eugene: I'm not trying to dominate the conversation (*laughter*), but it's the glacial pace that both politics and religion move at. I'm going to date myself for a moment, but the late eighties, Murphy Brown, a television character, became a single mom, and you thought someone shot the president the way people in this country reacted. You look back at that now, and I show some of my students, when I teach a class occasionally, history of the media. They look at it, and they go, "Really? This was an issue?" Who even thinks about that now? That's less than twenty years ago. Are we, twenty years from now, going to be saying "Really? This was an issue?" But up until now, things really did move at a slower pace. It was a hundred years before people said, "Oh, separate is unequal?" We've moved beyond that. We need to pick up the pace.

(0:59:56.4) TELL ME YOUR THOUGHTS ON PEOPLE BEING EQUAL IN CHRISTIANITY?

Patrick: It doesn't happen.

Male respondent: It's very hierarchical.

Male respondent: From its very conception, people have never been equal in Christianity according to the way it's been preached. The way the story has changed. It's never been about equality.

(1:00:20.4) IS THIS UNIQUE TO CHRISTIANITY, OR DOES THIS HAPPEN AMONG OTHER RELIGIONS?

Patrick: I see it . . .

Brian: It's unique to the society. It's a society thing.

Lee: It's community versus community. To put it in very broad terms, the haves and have nots. I have this God, you have that God, you don't belong to my community, therefore, you are lesser than I am.

(1:00:46.1) IS THE SOCIETY A COMMUNITY?

Lee: Small community, large community.

(1:00:51.2) I MEAN CHRISTIANITY.

Lee: Christianity as a whole is very big. But it's split up into factions.

Eugene: Not monolithic.

Patrick: It's evolved. Not monolithic. It used to just be Roman Catholic, and then that damn Martin Luther.

Eugene: Even with the Great Schism. The father in Constantinople said, "Wait, why do you get all the power there in Rome?"

Lee: It's all a different version of the same thing.

(1:01:36.2) ACROSS ALL RELIGIONS?

Corey: Yes, occasionally I go to church with my wife. Same damn thing.

Eugene: Some are just more open about it.

Brian: Isn't it true that all religions are based off of Kabbalah?

Eugene: No. There's no way. You're looking at Buddhism, and Buddhism is considered a religion, but it's a philosophy. That's so different. Your monotheistic religions, yes, especially because Muhammad was a caravan trader. He was familiar with Jews, he was familiar with Christians at the time. And Islam. There was a story. Exactly. We're talking about equality and non-equality. Hinduism is based on the caste system. You're either at the top and life is good, or you're at the bottom and . . .

Tony: You'll never leave.

Eugene: Exactly. It's not a Western religion thing or an Eastern religion thing.

Corey: I think Brian had it right, society is that way. There is nothing in the world, anywhere, that is equal, that is based on equality.

(1:02:47.4) IF YOU HAD TO PUT CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGION INTO PILES OR GROUPS OR ON A CONTINUUM, WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH IT?

Eugene: Well, if we're looking at Christianity as just sort of Christianity, or are we saying Roman Catholics, Lutherans?

(1:03:02.0) ALL CHRISTIANITY.

Lee: If we're talking personal opinion, I know this isn't how it is in reality, but I saw this political cartoon, and there was a bunch of . . . there was Jesus with people like, "What about the gays? What about the Muslims?" Questioning "Love Thy Neighbor," he's like, "Did I f***** stutter? Just love!" In my opinion of my personal, spiritual view, everybody is the same. Everybody under God is the same. In actual practice, I think that's what you guys were talking about with the different subsets, looking down upon different sects and stuff. Should it be that way? No. But I think we've made strides over time. At least more recently.

Eugene: We've come close. I'd say the Quakers, they're no more. He said love your neighbor, don't ever raise your hand in violence. They stuck to that. It must be hard being a Quaker.

Corey: They have eight-and-a-half-hour services. It's brutal.

(1:04:28.2 - 1:06:34.6 MODERATOR SHARES CHART ABOUT EXPLAINING EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS' BELIEFS) WHEN YOU SEE THIS TYPE OF DESCRIPTION, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THINGS LIKE CONVERSION?

Tony: I hear conversion in any religion, and I think militant recruiting.

Eugene: Reprogramming.

Kir: Reprogramming.

Lee: Brainwashing.

Brian: For me, I think a change. But maybe, 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.

(1:07:38.5) TELL ME ABOUT THE "BORN AGAIN" PIECE OF IT.

Tony: Think about it, oh you're born again, all your past, the bad things you've done in life, all of your sins are forgiven if you're born again. Right? *(1:08:00.6 Inaudible/crosstalk and laughter.)*

Kir: Spiritual bankruptcy.

Tony: Exactly.

Brian: I think it depends a lot on the religion. I feel that that's a very big thing, definitely in Catholicism. That's a very big thing, you get to a point and you do something and everything else is forgiven. It depends on . . .

(1:08:20.3) YOU GO TO CONFESSION, RIGHT?

Brian: Yes. The religion that I grew up in, it's not necessarily that you're suddenly going to go to heaven. It's more that what they believe in is that it's a work in progress. You are every day trying to be a better person so that hopefully you can help others, love others, and help yourself to become a better person and eventually go to heaven. But it's not that I'm born again and I'm suddenly holy. I guess it depends on the context.

(1:08:55.8) I HEARD BANKRUPTCY?

Kir: I was just making a comparison to the bankruptcy laws here. You can start fresh.

Lee: Clean slate.

Kir: Clean slate, yes.

Patrick: We're human beings, and just in the fact that we are human beings, pardon my language, but we f*** up a lot. We also do a lot of good stuff, too. The fact that there's that offer of instant

redemption, instant, because it's a very popular thing to do in prison, it's a very popular thing to increase your political career. It's a very popular thing when you're going through addiction. All of us have the willingness and the ability to change within ourselves. Why can't we change and evolve looking at our past behaviors, instead of saying, "Oh, I'm just absolved of it." No, that's not the way that progress happens.

Eugene: 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. Whereas if I'm Jewish, and I suddenly wake up one day and I go, "Nope, Jesus was right."

(1:10:36.2) CONVERSION IS A CORE BELIEF IN THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH. THE WAY PRESBYTERIANS BELIEVE IN PREDESTINATION.

Eugene: When I hear convert, I go from one religion to another religion. If I'm a Roman Catholic who believes in Jesus, I already . . .

(1:11:08.3) YOU'RE ALREADY THERE?

Eugene: I'm already there. So how does this tenet, 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?

Brian: You're not living your life according to their beliefs.

Eugene: Oh, so this is their interpretation?

(Three respondents agree.)

(1:11:31.5) IF YOU'RE BORN AGAIN, YOU'RE BORN AGAIN SPIRITUALLY, WHICH MEANS JESUS CAN SEE YOU.

Eugene: It is that Evangelicals want to proselytize to get you literally to convert. Conversion is accepting their religious worldview.

Brian: I don't think we have the . . .

(1:11:59.3) IT'S NOT CONSIDERED ONE OF THEIR CORE BELIEFS. BUT THE ACTION, THE EXPRESSION OF DEMONSTRATING FAITH THROUGH WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS THAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, THE PROSELYTIZING.

Brian: I was just saying that 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.

Tony: I think born again sounds silly. It just sounds silly.

Male respondent: People practice reincarnation.

Tony: (1:12:59.1 *Inaudible/crosstalk and low voice*)

Brian: Sometimes I wake up, like yesterday or two days ago, I had a horrible day. I was like, I'm going to stop doing music for X and Y reason. I was just devastated. The next day, I was like, you know what? F*** it. I can do this. It's sort of that attitude with a lot of them. It's not a . . . I can't make my point. The point is, a Christian is more like you stand up and you're like, "Okay, I'm going to be positive now instead of always being this way."

(1:13:35.3) IT'S ALONG THE LINES OF WHAT PATRICK WAS SAYING. YOU PROCESS THROUGH.

Patrick: Exactly. You work through it.

Lee: It's a little bit about what Patrick was saying earlier. 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 \$50.00 up at the altar, say five Hail Marys, 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. To further what Patrick was saying earlier, 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."

Brian: 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. At least from studying a couple of religions, I know for Protestants, that's usually the idea.

Eugene: Can you be a lapsed Evangelical? If you've already been born again, can you be reborn again?

Brian: Yes. I don't know, but at least in the Protestant religions, I do know that some of them, a lot of them—some of them go to church and then leave and decide to come again and they're reborn.

Eugene: Reborn. You can be born again multiple times if you're not very (1:15:39.6 *inaudible/crosstalk and laughter.*)

Brian: But 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 Marys, 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.

Tony: That's also a misinterpretation of that. Even the Catholic church says that you don't just come and if you give me five bucks then you're all set. You have to genuinely believe it yourself that you're confessing what it is, and that you feel truly sorry for what you did. Now, whether you relapse and do it again, that's another story. But the fact that you are actually confessing because you felt terrible about it, that is where the cleansing happens. Not just, "Okay, I did something really bad. Where's the local church? I think I have five bucks on me." *(Laughter.)*

Corey: That's funny. I never thought about that when I was a kid. *(Laughter.)* Should have.

Tony: But that's what they're supposed to be teaching, and whether you understand it, that's just bad teaching.

(1:17:08.3) ONE OF THE OTHER CORE BELIEFS IS ACTION; DEMONSTRATING FAITH, WORKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS.

Corey: The first thing that came to mind when you said that is the hardcore people with the signs, protesting, groups, and mobs.

Kir: 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." *(1:18:01.4 Inaudible/crosstalk.)*

Tony: People handing out flyers. There was this guy down by South Station years ago with . . .

Eugene: He's still there.

Tony: Is he still there?

Male respondent: I've seen him around.

Male respondent: *(1:18:10.2 Inaudible/crosstalk.)*

Tony: He's handing out flyers that the world's going to end; everyone needs to convert. No one is going to buy your version because you look like an idiot. That's not a good way to spread the story.

Kir: It sounds a little crazy and a little bit mentally unstable. They're so focused on one thing that . . .

Corey: There's another guy that stands down on Washington Street. He's usually got a Bruins shirt on, screaming about the Bible. I don't know if you've ever seen this guy, but the same thing. Screaming about Jesus.

Lee: You see a lot of Boston people like that. *(Laughter.)*

Patrick: Even if they're well dressed. A group of gentlemen, maybe it was mixed, I remember they were well dressed but they came up and started talking about religion. And I immediately thought, "Cult." I was like—

Lee: That's what I always think about.

Corey: That's actually one of the big turnoffs for me is their action. They feel the need to advertise it. 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, if I give \$1,000 to Boston Strong because that's all up in the news, I don't 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 \$1,000 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.

(1:19:56.5) DO PEOPLE TELL YOU THAT THEY GAVE MONEY SO THEY'RE A GOOD CHRISTIAN?

Corey: Whether it's donating to a charity or whatever, it's always what their religion tells us that we need to do in the name of Jesus Christ. All this other stuff. 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.

Brian: 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.

Eugene: Did you do this on purpose? Put action and the Bible on opposite poles?

(1:21:56.1) NO I DIDN'T, SHOULD I HAVE?

Eugene: No, the way this is, they're almost incompatible. You can't work for social justice and have a strict obedience to the Bible. That's not possible in today's world.

(1:22:12.8) TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT.

Eugene: You'd have to stone Lee. Sorry, Lee. You seem like a nice guy. *(Laughter.)*

Lee: That's very true.

Eugene: 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.

Brian: I don't think all religions necessarily take the Old Testament in the Bible as truth. Not necessarily, but some religions know to put some things in context. And hello Judaism. The first part of the Bible is almost the same as the Jewish . . . I don't see Jews stoning people. What I'm saying is to them, I feel like Evangelical Christians, a lot of the meaning that they take are mainly teachings about love and that apply to our time. Not necessarily, especially in terms of religion that eliminates the first half of the Bible and takes it more as a context to those times versus our times.

Eugene: Then maybe it's just the wording. Did you write this?

(1:23:49.8) IT WAS WRITTEN FOR ME.

Eugene: So it could just be the wording. (*Laughter.*) But the high regard for the Bible and obedience to the Bible as an ultimate authority, and I understand where you're coming from. That, to me, means you can't pick and choose what you want to say you're going to focus on. It's 2013, so we're going to scale back. You're either, this is the ultimate authority and you believe it, or you're . . .

Tony: In for a penny, in for a pound.

Eugene: Yes.

Lee: I could say a little something on the action piece. One of the points that I brought up was some of my husband's more religious family members. 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. For actions through social justice, that's a whole piece.

(1:25:23.3) THEN THE CROSS, A STRONG EMPHASIS ON THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE REDEMPTION OF HUMANITY.

Corey: 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.

(1:26:07.4) I THINK BECAUSE HE DIED FOR THE SINS OF THOSE WHO WOULD COME AFTER HIM.

Lee: This is always one of the things that I felt was the ickiest part of Christianity in general. That in order to accept the (*1:26:21.5 inaudible/speech pattern*) of the sins 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.

Brian: I guess in their mind, the purpose is that they don't focus on the negativity, that they're working towards the positive.

Lee: But if you're focusing on the negative so much, it goes back to the old psychological concept that . . .

Brian: I agree with you. *(Laughter.)*

Lee: When you ask somebody, don't think of a white polar bear, inevitably you're going to think of a white polar bear, whatever the psychology trick is. 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.

(1:27:28.9) YOU'RE THINKING OF "WE ARE SINNERS"?

Lee: Right.

Eugene: 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?

Patrick: It'd be a lot more interesting.

Eugene: 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?

Lee: 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.

Eugene: Mm-hmm *(affirmative)*.

Brian: I bring up my religion a lot, but it's what I know. The religion I grew up in. One of the commandments is that you will not have other idols other than myself. I know that at least in my religion, I don't know about them, but . . . it's not my religion, but you know. They don't believe in the cross or the Virgin Mary. Nothing like that. The religion I grew up in is all about Jesus. You don't see anybody wearing crosses. You don't even see a cross in the church I grew up in. Sometimes there's one, but it's just because . . . it represents Jesus, but it's not, "Oh, let's worship the cross." It's not about the symbol. At least the religion that I grew up in, it's not about the symbols. I think they're a little bit closer to what I grew up in. But talking about redemption or the cross, to me, whenever I think about it as being the sacrifice.

Eugene: They've made it more important than the act that was carried out on it.

Brian: I guess I understand why it is. If you look at Judaism, it was all about the sacrificial lamb, and then Jesus became the sacrificial lamb and replaced having to sacrifice a lamb every time you messed up or every quarter of the year. I don't know how it was.

(1:29:44.4) THE OFFERINGS.

Brian: Yes. It replaced that. It took away the cruelty of having to kill an animal, the inconvenience. Now, all you have to do is pray and ask for forgiveness. I guess that's where they come from, the historical context of that.

Eugene: Which is ironic, because the ram replaced human sacrifice, because the son wasn't killed. God stopped him before Isaac was killed and said, "Hey, kill this ram instead." Then a human was sacrificed due to . . .

Brian: Not exactly. Biblical sacrifices were way before Abraham. If you go to Cain and Abel, they were sacrificing lambs or whatever even before that event happened in the Bible. I don't think the Bible ever talks about that. That was the only indication that it was us. It was a unique occasion.

Kir: I think I have a different version or idea than the rest of the room. Out of all four categories, the cross I'm most comfortable with. It's a symbol. It was basically what the little mythos or storyline, his mission, whatever, is based around. I have no problem with that. I don't find it offensive.

Tony: It's because you've seen it so many times, everywhere in your life so far. You're so used to it that it's just numb.

Kir: No, there's other religious symbolism that I have no problems with. Except for the swastika. That's not really religious.

(1:31:41.3) LIKE THE SIX-POINTED STAR.

Kir: Yes. That's fine. That's not offensive to me at all.

Corey: It's no different than any other symbol or icon. It's like yin and yangs.

Brian: I'm noticing the ring is your symbol of loving another person. It's just a symbol. The cross doesn't bother me. The only reason why it bothers me is because I know the Ten Commandments, and you're not supposed to have an idol. But there are these other people worshipping Mary or the saints or the cross. What happened to the commandments that you supposedly follow in the Bible? That's my only issue with it.

(1:32:23.2) HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR OPINION OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY BASED ON ALL OF YOUR EXPERIENCES AND INFORMATION?

Corey: Dump it.

Tony: Chill out. The extremists. Take a deep breath and realize they're no more special than anybody else.

(1:33:14.1) CAN I GET YOU TO SAY THAT (1:33:13.7 inaudible/low volume.)

Kir: I just judge less. Judge less and listen more.

Brian: Can you repeat your question?

(1:33:26.5) KNOWING ALL THAT YOU KNOW, SUM UP WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS.

Eugene: Everything is done to the extreme.

James: I still think of what I see on TV. A lot of it is for show.

Patrick: It's all about the shows, the stadiums.

James: More about the concept than about actual spirituality.

Patrick: Yes, exactly.

(1:34:09.4 - 1:34:36.0 MODERATOR DESCRIBES A SITUATION WHERE A COWORKER ASKS YOU ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY.)

(1:34:36.1) WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THIS GUY WHO IS GOING TO GO TO LUNCH WITH AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ABOUT IT?

James: Why do you want to know? What does it matter?

Kir: If he's going to lunch because he's a nice person to hang out with, there's no reason to say anything.

(1:34:41.4) IF YOUR FRIEND ASKS IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, WOULD YOU TELL THEM WHAT YOU KNOW?

Brian: I don't think we should jump to conclusions or judge them; then we'd be doing the same thing they're doing to us. The only thing you can say is, "Oh, sure. I know this and this about Evangelical Christians, but that's it. I know it's a religion."

(1:35:10.1) WHAT IS THIS AND THIS?

Brian: I would say it's a religion, and they believe about sharing Jesus' love. They believe about sharing it with others. Who cares? Everybody . . . even if it was a Muslim who was inviting you, are you going to say, "Oh, be careful. He might have a bomb." It'd be a stupid thing to jump to. Don't jump to conclusions. Why are you judging?

Lee: Why are you asking me?

Eugene: Yes, it's like saying, "Lee wants to go out to lunch, but he's gay. What do you know about him?"
(*Laughter.*)

Lee: Thinking of the broad, basic people that I know, I don't know anyone who has come up to me and said, "What do you know about those Evangelical Christians?" I'd want to know, "Why the hell are you asking me?"

Patrick: I see your point.

(1:36:07.9) I'VE CALLED PEOPLE BEFORE GOING TO AN AMWAY MEETING AND ASKED WHAT THEY KNEW ABOUT AMWAY.

Brian: That's different. Amway is a corporation. What do you know about that?

James: In that specific situation, I'd just say that it is a religion. If they say something like, "Oh, I'm going to go to this rally sponsored by the American Heritage Foundation," I'm going to have some words about that just because of what that is.

Brian: I wouldn't even have words. I'd be like, "Oh cool. It seems like you're interested. Go for it. Who am I to tell you not to go?"

Lee: Who cares? (1:37:04.1 *Inaudible/crosstalk.*)

(1:37:06.3) I WOULD LIKE YOU TO SUM UP WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN A CONCISE, ARTICULATED STATEMENT THAT GOES FURTHER THAN "DUMP IT."

Eugene: Do as I say, not as I do.

Lee: In the context of the coworker scenario, if it was somebody that I felt like I could trust, and not who would loudmouth me to my boss and get me fired later on, I would basically be straightforward with them and tell them what my experience was with Evangelical Christianity.

(1:38:01.6) THAT WOULD BE YOUR SISTER-IN-LAW?

Lee: Yes, and I do have a little bit of personal experience with it as well. I had a friend who attended a Pentecostal Church way back in high school. I went to a few meetings with him over a couple of months. Part of the reason I went was because I had an intrigue about it. A lot of people were describing it as a cult, that they were very cultlike in their behavior and the way that they carry out their church. I wanted to check that out and see for myself whether it was true. More or less in a nutshell, it was kind of true in a way. From my personal experience at least. I wouldn't necessarily say it was a cult, because they definitely had their own method of doing everything, the traditions. But the behavior could very easily be interpreted as cultlike.

Tony: 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. It's interesting listening to all of us say what the middle ground is. Even in

our wording of things, we weren't thinking middle grounds of things. We were judgmental of them. You can describe a group and not be judgmental with them. Maybe I'm doing it myself by saying black and white, but that's, to me, just a statement of fact that's neutral. Some people may be fine with being black and white, some people prefer shades of gray. It doesn't make one thing more correct than the other.

(1:39:43.0) I'VE ASKED WHAT YOU FOUND OBJECTIONABLE ABOUT CHRISTIANITY, BUT I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HOW WE CAN TALK ABOUT YOUR JUDGMENTAL NATURE, AND BEING SIMILARLY JUDGMENTAL.

Brian: I don't know if, and maybe I'm mistaken, there's a difference between Evangelical Christians as a whole. There can be Evangelical Christians in every religion, but I think right now we're talking about Evangelical Christian churches. I wouldn't say that they're all black and white, because even the statement here says that they are a very diverse group with varying theology and levels of participation in religion. You can't say they're black and white because it's a religion. It's a huge umbrella of different people that are black and white or in the middle. I would personally probably say it's another religion in the Protestant, who, just like most of them, worship on Sunday, reads the Bible, and believes to their own interpretation, trying to follow God. I guess that's what an Evangelical Christian is to me personally.

Corey: My view is part that, but 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 percent true, or you're not Evangelical.

(1:41:42.9) IS THAT WHERE YOU WERE GOING WITH THE BLACK AND WHITE?

Tony: Mm-hmm (*affirmative*). Either you're all in or . . . there's no room for moderation. There's no room for anything else.

Brian: I would probably say that they firmly believe in sharing their love of Jesus with you. However, it is just interpreted as their religion. I know that they're the ones who go walking around a lot, along with Mormons, and knock. Door to door.

Eugene: They're more vocal Mormons, and less violent Sharia.

Brian: That's a good way to put it. I've never experienced them here. In the US, I've never seen them knock at the door, the Evangelicals. But when I lived in Mexico for a very long time, I did. There were a lot of Evangelical Christians in Mexico that would walk around. It was interesting.

Tony: 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. I don't have the same beliefs, but to give it to somebody else, just have an open mind. If something really feels wrong with it, then back out. When I said dump it, that's my black and white response. Obviously it's way more complex than that. You can't just wipe

something. You can't do the omnipresent wipe of something. It never works that way. Every culture that tries to wipe something clean, it always festers. My advice to the Evangelical Church is just to calm down. Please.

Eugene: If they took three out of the four core beliefs, and just said, "This is how we're going to live our lives, and our lives are going to be a model." People would look at that and say, "Wow. That's something I want to be a part of." They would come. But they hammer you. It's that conversion. If we're really looking for the one that . . . As a Northeasterner and as a Jew, it's what I have the biggest problem with. 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.

Corey: My opinion is little bits and pieces of what everyone else said so I can't contribute.

(1:45:35.3) ARE THERE ANY OTHER COMMENTS, IDEAS, OBJECTIONS?

James: One thing about the Evangelical Church and its political message is the fact that Evangelicals . . . When a fringe group comes out, the church very rarely says, "You're too extreme." If a portion . . . especially with things in Israel escalating, political things aside, from the Yom Kippur war, I've been extremely happy that Israel still exists. That's a sign of worldwide politics. I'm so glad that happened. But when a fringe element happens and says you should push Israel back into the sea, they don't try to quiet that down. They accept that into their ideology and keep that attack. That's so appallingly damaging.

(1:46:44.0) WHO DOES THAT?

James: The Evangelical Church. That's so damaging. That's the action that they don't care. They're still going to hammer that message at people. They burn the American flag, so let's get one of our Georgian religious . . .

Eugene: Let's have Florida burn the Koran.

James: Yes, burning the Koran. The Evangelical Church, what are you going to do? They're not going to say no, but they kind of want to do it at the same time. They're forcing that message; they're hammering it in. Turn that vinegar into battery acid. It just keeps going and going and going. I don't see a stop to it and that really discourages me.

Corey: Again, that can be said about most religions. That can be said about Muslims.

James: That's true. (1:47:41.8 Inaudible/crosstalk.)

Corey: The extremism.

James: It's on all sides and it's still really disturbing.

Eugene: Jews coming out, smelling clean again. *(Laughter.)*

James: 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 fifty 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.

Eugene: It's a little less true. Texas does have a huge influence in terms of textbooks, but it's still universities that drive what the textbook manufacturers and writers are doing. I'd say a better example is the guy, the circuit court judge, who just said, "Oh, there's a morality clause in your divorce, and your partner can't be in your house after nine. She has to get out or your kids go back to your husband, even though he's given up all rights." Last week in Texas.

(1:50:02.3) IS THAT AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN?

Eugene: Yes, he is. He came out and said, "Hey, I'm hammering this morality clause because of how I feel about two women living together. Not about what's best for the kids. That's not important."

THANK YOU . . .