

Objections to Christianity

Group 1

5/20/2013 5:30 PM

Austin TX

(0:02:00.7-0:02:27.6) INTRODUCTIONS . . . WHAT IS YOUR NAME, AND SOME BACKGROUND?

Andrew: I'm from Maryland originally. Moved here about seven, eight years ago. I am a musician here. I live with my girlfriend. I have a cat and a dog.

(0:02:45.1) A WHOLE FAMILY.

Andrew: Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)*

(0:02:46.3) WHAT DO YOU PLAY?

Andrew: Guitar.

John: I'm originally from Dallas. I'm here going to UT. I'm a junior this year, I'll be a senior in the fall. I'm currently studying for the LSAT. I live with three other guys.

(0:03:01.9) STILL STUDYING?

John: Yes, I am.

Adam: I'm from Austin, born and raised. I went to the University of Tennessee. I just got back about a year ago. I work for a lobbyist right now, for this session. I'll be working at a law firm after that. I live with two of my friends from high school and my dog.

(0:03:28.1) WHAT TYPE OF DOG?

Adam: Lab, *(0:03:29.8 unclear/low volume)*.

Jerrod: I moved to Austin about five years ago from a small town in north central Texas for school. Then I loved it so much I didn't want to leave. I got a job at a cool start-up company doing client relations and client support. Had that role for about a year and a half. *(0:04:00.7 Unclear/low volume response)*.

Robert: I'm from northwest Montana. I grew up there almost all my life. Came to UT for grad school. Now I am a researcher at the university, and I am actually going to start working on a start-up in a few months, so I'm pretty excited about that. I live by myself.

Dan: I moved here in 2000 from Boston. I take care of nineteen kids all day . . . no, I'm kidding. I live alone. I work full time. I guess that's about it.

(0:04:38.3) WHAT DO YOU DO?

Dan: I'm in the finance industry.

(0:04:46.7) THE WEATHER IS DIFFERENT HERE THAN BOSTON.

Dan: Yes. Mostly for the positive.

Jamie: I was born in New York. Spent about six years in my home country, which is Nigeria. Been in Austin for about twenty-seven years. Work for the state—tax analyst—and I live alone.

(0:05:17.0) YOU'RE BUSY.

Jamie: Keeps me employed. *(Laughter.)*

Daniel: I am from Austin. I live with two other single people, roommate situation. I work for a Catholic nonprofit healthcare company here in Austin.

(0:05:42.4) WHAT KIND OF A NONPROFIT?

Daniel: A hospital network.

Mark: Born in Dallas but have crisscrossed the country. Came to Austin with my job. I'm an enterprise architect. I'm married. My husband and I just have three dogs, no kids.

(0:06:11.0) SAME TYPE OF DOGS?

Mark: Yes, they're all three miniature Dachshunds. They're getting to be old and toothless, and hard of hearing. They never listened to begin with, but now they have an excuse.

(0:06:24.7) NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED.

Mark: No.

Tomas: I'm a videographer at UT. I'm from Houston, unfortunately. I've been here for fifteen years now, and I live with my girlfriend and two cats.

(0:06:44.6) YOU ONLY HAVE ONE CAT.

Andrew: The cat is mine, the dog is hers. You've got to have a backyard for a dog.

(0:06:51.8) TWO AUSTIN NATIVES AND TWO CATS.

Mark: Nothing against Houston, though.

(0:07:07.1-0:08:35.6) MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE FORMAT AND SCOPE OF THE INTERVIEW.)**(0:08:35.6) YOU WORK FOR A CATHOLIC GROUP IN HEALTHCARE?**

Daniel: Yes.

(0:08:39.8-0:09:07.9 MODERATOR CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN THE FORMAT: DISCUSSION OF CHRISTIANITY, CHURCH, AND JESUS.)

(0:09:07.9) WHEN I SAY WE ARE GOING TO TALK ABOUT CHRISTIANITY, WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL THOUGHTS?

Jerrod: You have to separate it out because you've got several different things there.

(0:09:25.4) WHAT ELSE?

Adam: My first one was, "Who's paying for this?" *(Laughter.)*

Male respondent: I had the same thought.

Male respondent: I was raised in a Christian household so I harken back to my transition away from Christianity, if we're talking about the context of all of that.

Male respondent: I think about Christians that I see on TV.

(0:10:03.2) GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE.

Male respondent: Either Sunday morning preachers or people you see who are taking some sort of political stance. And invoking their religion into whatever that is.

(0:10:21.4) WHAT'S THE INITIAL THOUGHT WHEN I SAY "CHRISTIANITY"?

Male respondent: The church, Jesus. I guess maybe some childhood memories of going to church. Things like that.

Male respondent: Jesus.

Adam: I think of the church. I'm a history major, so studying the past two thousand years basically. The influence of Christianity on everything that happened. That was through the church but it was Christianity driven.

Mark: I think of it in terms of it's not what many of its followers seem to think it is, both from the standpoint of there's this set doctrine that was whispered into somebody's ear and was written down and it's exactly correct regardless of how many times it's been translated. I believe that throughout history we can see the same things with Christianity in terms of the adoption of other religious practices and beliefs as it spread throughout the world. Even pre-Christian and Judaism. The idea that, "Oh, this is truth" when in fact, "Wait, but this is from Zoroastrianism, and this is actually an influence from post-Christian start-up of Islam" whatever, "paganism in the British Isles."

(0:12:09.5) "HOW IS THIS TRUE?" THEN, "WHAT DOES THIS MAKE THESE IF THIS IS—"

Mark: If someone wants to believe this is some sort of perfect truth and unalterable, but potentially take parts of it but not all of it, when in fact parts of it actually were introduced post-Jesus. How is this possible? Who gets to pick, which parts do we choose, and what do we let go of and how do we make this fit our preconceived notions of the way the world is, and the people are? Things like that.

(0:12:37.2) YOU HAVE LAYERS OF QUESTIONS.

Mark: It's not the simple truth, in my mind, that a lot of people want to make it out to be.

(0:12:48.6) HOW DID YOU ACQUIRE YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARD CHRISTIANITY?

Male respondent: I just think about going to Sunday school as a kid.

(0:13:02.0) WHAT HAPPENED?

Male respondent: 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."

(0:13:12.9) WHY?

Male respondent: 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 never 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 on the church bulletin.

Male respondent: To Sunday school?

Male respondent: Yes.

Male respondent: Oh, okay.

Male respondent: *(0:13:43.1 Unclear/multiple speakers)* deal with it.

Male respondent: 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 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 and that kind of stuff.

(0:14:21.6) DOES SUNDAY SCHOOL FALL UNDER THE LABEL OF CHRISTIANITY OR CHURCH?

Male respondent: First memory . . . I don't really think Christianity as much. As a child I think that's where a lot of my memories come from when it comes to Christianity, because that was when you were a little bit arrested under your parents' guidance. You don't really have a whole lot of freedom or independent thought to go out and do your own thing. You're just following along. Then when you

become an adult, then you start making your decisions and moving on to something, whatever you may want to move on to.

Dan: I grew up Jewish. I had Sunday school, too. It was at the temple and stuff and it was probably more or less the same experience. For me it was just like school on a Sunday, having to wake up early, then you sit in a classroom while an adult talks to you for three to four hours and you go back home. I guess that's my feelings toward the Sunday school thing. Also, growing up, I had to go to Hebrew school on weekdays to learn a whole other language so I could one day have my Bar Mitzvah. Then I ended up going to an Episcopal school from sixth grade on. I just thought, "I've been doing this, more or less the same stuff," but I got to do it in English. It was so much easier to participate and understand what was going on. "I don't necessarily agree with all this stuff, but at least I can understand what you're singing, so that's more fun." At that point I was really confused, as far as going to Sunday school and stuff like that, those were my first memories. It was seeing that my Christian friends had done the same thing as well, but it was just slightly different.

(0:16:16.3) DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIGURED OUT WHAT CHRISTIANITY WAS?

Male respondent: I grew up as a child going to Catholic church. My parents, all my family, are Catholic. It's funny, I always thought about it as "church" and I thought about it in terms of Catholics, but rarely thought about it in terms of Christianity. I stopped going to church a long time ago. I hear other denominations of Christians, it almost seems like Catholicism isn't even thought of in that same category even, as a thing unto itself.

Male respondent: I would speak to that. I was raised Catholic too. Some of my Protestant friends looked at you as if you were sort of culty. Which is funny when you think about how much bigger the Catholic Church is than the Protestant.

Male respondent: Also I don't ever remember any of my family referring to themselves . . . They would in a literal way refer to themselves as Christians. But that wasn't the way—they would refer to themselves as Catholics most of the time. *(One respondent agreed.)*

(0:17:30.3) DID YOU HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCE?

Male respondent: Yes. A Catholic is a Catholic, so I would say that's my experience. It's not exclusive, though. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: I just think that *(0:17:39.2 unclear/multiple speakers)*—

Male respondent: Catholics could just . . . it's Christianity, I guess.

Male respondent: It's still Christianity.

(0:17:45.3) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON CHURCH?

Jamie: My memories go back to when I was in Nigeria. Like I said before, I grew up, when I was about eleven, twelve to about sixteen in Nigeria. The majority of the population is Muslim. But in the state that I was living in, our culture, our tribe, so to speak, were mostly Christian. They take it very seriously. Going to church on Sundays was a big deal and it required a lot of the day. You get there about eight in the morning and you wouldn't leave until about five, for a church service. Of course being at that age it didn't sit well with me, of course. I didn't have the attention span for that. That probably formed my opinion, I guess. Not that it took my faith away, but it wasn't something I said I need to be going to church every week. But as I grew up and I came back to the States—I was born here—I was skeptical of people and what their purposes were in church. 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. 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 sins forgiven and talk to God, why do I have to go to church to do that? *(One respondent agreed.)* Was my thought and that remains my thought today.

Male respondent: I agree with that. The way I grew up was, my mom's dad was a Baptist preacher and my dad was Episcopalian. His grandparents were some of the founding members of our Episcopal church in Dallas. I went to the same church for eighteen years before I came to Austin. Every Sunday, seven or eight o'clock service. For me it was weird because a lot of my friends in my area were usually Methodist or nondenominational or they go to more modern churches. So when they went to church they could wear pretty much what they wanted to and have later evening services, even. When we went it was full, wear button-down slacks at the very least. My grandfather would usually always go in a suit. It was very interesting for me, especially as I got older. I started thinking about it and I read some different things and I've always thought that church is more for man and faith as for God. That's the way I've always thought about it. I don't go to church as much when I'm at school here because there's no one really driving me to go. I really don't feel like that's a conflict with my religion in any way.

(0:21:17.6) YOU AGREED?

Male respondent: I agree with most everything that's been said so far. *(Laughter.)* I haven't thought much about religion in many, many years because for me it was pretty much over the day I ended school for it when I was fifteen.

(0:21:35.6) WHY?

Male respondent: It wasn't interesting to me; I didn't care about it. It was very inconsequential. That sort of thing. My parents are very much like, "Well, you can make up your own mind. You did everything we told you to do and you're done, so from here on out it's up to you." And they left me alone about it ever since. It's just been something that's there, but I don't think about it. It's not necessary, that sort of thing.

Male respondent: My mom was much more devout than my father was in terms of going to church and wanting to go. My parents divorced when I was pretty young. Sunday rolled around and I was with my

dad at the time, it was like, “Well, do you want to go to church?” “Of course I don’t want to go.” *(Laughter.)* He said, “Fine, all right, we’re not going to church then.”

Male respondent: I guess for the background, I’m Jewish and never went to church. I wasn’t particularly religious, in any case. As soon as I got to college I stopped doing anything even remotely connected to religion of this sort, of Jewish or Christian. That being said, my big picture view of all of this, going along with what a lot of people have said so far, is Christianity to me, it seems as if as people become more materialistic and better off financially *(0:23:04.2 unclear/background noise)* world has gone on, Christianity seems to be moving further and further away from what they care about. Also, the people I know who are the most spiritual, whatever that term means, tend to move away from Christianity as well, and not just Christianity but the organized religions. That’s been my impression of the people I’ve known. That being said, I think people like church quite a bit because there are very few things in life as an adult where you have a community. Just again, from people I know it seems like the most active group of single people, single events for grown-ups, are the church groups. Whatever you look at, the church groups provide the community they just don’t find, really, in anything else, not anything else but just really hard to duplicate in any other thing for grown-ups. Well, single or married, I guess.

(0:24:01.3) PEOPLE, AS THEY GET MORE SPIRITUAL, MOVE AWAY FROM THE ORGANIZED CHURCH?

Male respondent: My dad was Jewish, my mom was Christian. Obviously both families had Christmas and Hanukkah and Passover right before Easter. I grew up just seeing how easily it coexisted. Unless it’s super important to you, you have to make it your whole life; it really only comes up at certain points, the religious part of yourself, “Which one do I identify with?” I guess it can be a small part of you, and it’s so easy just for people to have it not affect their lives at all with relationships with other people. I guess what you do see of religion on TV and stuff, or on the news, is when it does conflict with each other, when it does make problems. That was just always to me was, well, I see that it doesn’t have to make problems. It’s causing death around the world. I feel like it’s the number one cause of death in the history of mankind, is religious disputes. That, just, for me was like, “What’s the point of it then?” You can believe in something but at the expense of somebody else and what you think about them, just because of that one thing? 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 respondent: I agree. That was what still turns me off to this day. I think every religion has something worthwhile to it, and I think they all have something worthwhile to say—

Male respondent: They’re all a lot more similar than what people actually think when it really comes down to it. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: Yes. In Christianity that’s a topic that has a lot of great lessons. People who I know who are Christian who follow that ideology are some of the best people I know. I think it is dangerous for a certain kind of person when they do think it’s real. That this history and Jesus and God and this

story is things that actually happened. People who think that Noah and the Ark and the Flood was something that actually happened and they're willing to fight for it, and fight over it and kill for it.

Male respondent: That's when people take into—(0:26:34.8 unclear/multiple speakers). I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Male respondent: No, no.

Male respondent: To the same point, I was going to say not to mention people who take advantage of religious people in governments and so forth and use that in order to get them behind their cause.

Male respondent: Even with what I said earlier, I'm not willing to say that some of the things that are talked about didn't happen, or couldn't have happened. But it's just 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 respondent: To me, not in any religion, I'm going to say most at least that we are probably talking about here with Christianity and others. I'm going to assume because I don't know all of their base beliefs, they might have a way of living and then some kind of conduct of how to conduct yourself. But the primary, or the biggest point I have is, I don't need to be a kumbaya person . . . It's love, right? Exist to get along. But we always fall below that baseline, for the most part, causing all these people dying for miscellaneous reasons.

Male respondent: Gandhi said, "I love your Christ, but I don't like your Christians." The first time I read that I was like, "That's cool; I like you."

(0:28:19.0) GANDHI SAID THAT?

Male respondent: Gandhi said that, yes.

(0:28:26.3) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN I SAY "JESUS"?

Male respondent: I just have an image of Jesus on the cross because it's there every time. That's what I think about.

(0:28:43.7) ANYTHING ELSE?

Male respondent: Story of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus. Most of the main stories people learn in Sunday school, which may be mainstream. Whether they're true or not, but the images you see of the birth and of the crucifixion and the resurrection and the healing and the walking on the water, those kinds of stories. I don't really think about Jesus in any more of a personalized sense. I think some other people do, though.

(0:29:16.5) YOU THINK OF THINGS THAT PERSON DID IN THE STORIES?

Male respondent: Stories and some lessons and some ideologies too.

(0:29:25.2) ANYONE ELSE?

Male respondent: I guess when you say, “What do you think of?” I guess the first thing that would pop in my mind would just be the standard bearded face and all that. I guess what I think of him would be I recognize the powerful symbol of Jesus and what that represents. We talked about the conduct and the lessons, they’re all through him and the example that he set. Even if you don’t believe in it, it’s a great example to live up to, whether or not it’s real or not. It’s been extremely powerful and you’ve got to respect that.

Male respondent: I think he just was an ascended master. There have been many ascended masters. Different faiths see them in different respects. I think that numerous Buddhas have been ascended masters.

(0:30:19.9) ASCENDENT?

Male respondent: Ascended, eh? The differentiation, yes. I think that he had a truth, or maybe numerous truths, and I think that he was trying to teach them to his people and along came people after him that said, “Hmm, how can we go crazy with this?” Which happens in other religions, too.

Male respondent: I think there’s something unique, though, about Jesus. I agree with what you were saying, but in the sense that no matter what you believe you can’t deny how popular and successful Christianity is and has been for so long. There’s something that’s got to be different, I think, than maybe just—

Male respondent: Is that because of Jesus—

Male respondent: Any person.

Male respondent: Or just because of the people that came after?

Male respondent: It could be a host of both.

Male respondent: It could be both, yes. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male respondent: You’ve got to argue that Mohammed was even more efficient than Jesus at getting people on his side. Mohammed did it himself; Jesus had to rely on other people. In my view there’s other people behind, maybe he did some of the things. You could say the Buddha had that, too; he had a good following.

Male respondent: Yes, millions and millions and billions of people.

Male respondent: The Christian Gospels didn't even start getting written down . . . the first of them was written down seventy-eight years after the crucifixion, so nobody who was actually there is likely to have even written them, what we know.

Male respondent: They picked the four books of the Bible four hundred years later out of twenty that were being passed around, so it was kind of like, well—

(0:31:50.3) WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS?

Male respondent: An ascended master. He was a master here on earth; now he's ascended. I think he had great teachings. I think that, as it states in the Bible, I won't try and quote it exactly, but he essentially names several groups of people, saying, "I came not for these different groups of people," like the Samaritans that all lived in that region, "I came for the Jews." His focus was trying to be a Jewish teacher, a Rabbi. He was seen as a cult leader by many of his contemporaries within the Jewish faith. Then afterward his cult spread and became very large, and suddenly there's an orthodoxy around it.

(0:32:51.9) HOW DID YOU GET TO THIS UNDERSTANDING?

Male respondent: I went from being raised in a pretty liberal Christian church to deciding that I wanted a more intense spiritual practice and moving toward charismatic worship, Assembly of God and Pentecostal Holiness. I became an ordained minister when I was fifteen. Then I went and took a left turn and just decided that Christianity was so far from what people thought it was that I needed to figure it out for myself. As I was trying to do that, I decided that it was so man made, 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.

(0:33:39.8) YOU MADE THIS TURN WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL?

Male respondent: No, I became an ordained minister when I was in high school. I didn't make the left turn until I was in college. I never stopped seeking and reading and studying. It's like the Council of Nicaea didn't canonize the Bible. It just created the separation between the Arian and the Trinitarian Christians to say, "Was he the risen God incarnate, man or not? Was the Virgin Mary the Christ?" (0:34:12.4 *unclear/Promesa fiel*). Was she carrying God, or was she carrying man enlightened?" And all these things. I realized that all these things were either decided by a group of whatever majority showed up, or a single person. It's like, "All right, I'm not sure I can have a trust and faith in that person."

(0:34:33.0) YOU'VE DONE THIS FOR A FEW YEARS, A LOT OF STUDY.

Male respondent: Yes.

(0:34:42.3) I DIDN'T STUDY THAT MANY BOOKS.

Male respondent: That doesn't make me knowledgeable necessarily.

(0:34:48.5) ABSORBING IT AND THINKING ON IT DOES.

Male respondent: I think even believers can say that this is a great teacher, at the very least, whose word has been perverted in a number of ways for a number of horrible, horrible reasons.

Male respondent: I also 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 to understand the point of 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 respondent: You guys can correct me if I'm wrong because I'm not really sure on this. If you're a Christian, then that means that you believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Is that right?

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

Male respondent: Is there anything else that you have to—

Mark: It depends on which Christian group. There's some Christians who would still call them Christian.

Male respondent: As basic as you could possibly be, is that, is there more?

Mark: You could dilute it to the point where, and some people told me they do and consider me a Christian, that by accepting that Jesus is an incarnation of a divinity with a truth to speak to mankind—

Male respondent: Okay.

Mark: By believing that and that by believing that by following the essence of his actual teachings regardless of what anybody else said afterward or anything else like that, that if I say that's true of me, then I'm a Christian.

(0:36:41.7) THAT'S YOUR INTERPRETATION.

Mark: No, no. that's what some people have told me. That's not mine, necessarily.

(0:36:46.4) IS THAT WHAT YOU BELIEVE, OR JUST A PIECE OF THE STORY?

Male respondent: That is what I believe essentially. Just because of what I've known or what I've been taught as I've grown up. Of course, Christianity has to do with where I am today and what I believe. When I do think of it now, the religion, Christianity, I don't necessarily, unfortunately I guess, don't think of Jesus Christ as you said. My thought goes automatically to the God as opposed to Jesus Christ. That might be because of the skepticism that I have in the church. While I believe, and if somebody asks me "What is your religion?" I do say Christianity, and that's what I still believe myself to be. My immediate thought is above, unfortunately, Jesus Christ. I feel bad saying that but . . . then I have to go back and I want to think a little bit deeper, then I'll go into thinking about Jesus Christ.

(0:37:58.0) YOU REFERRED TO SUPERNATURAL.

Male respondent: Yes. Right.

(0:38:01.9) TELL ME ABOUT SUPERNATURAL.

Male respondent: Rising from the dead or even the existence of a spirit world or whatever. That to me is not something that can be explained by nature, so therefore it's supernatural. Or if it exists at all, then there must be some natural phenomenon going on.

(0:38:22.8) WHEN YOU THINK OF JESUS, YOU THINK OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STORIES, TRUTHS, INSANITY?

Male respondent: It's a commonly repeated part of a lot of myths throughout the world. *(Laughter.)* Every great master was born of a virgin. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: It's kind of a Franken-myth. It's stolen from any number of things that the Romans conquered as they swept over and just grabbed this and this and that. Changed his birth to the winter solstice so they can take over the pagan celebrations, the winter solstice, and jam in their new character, that they're going to fall behind with that idea.

Male respondent: Historically we know he was born in the late spring, early summer. That's the time frame.

Male respondent: It's disingenuous but it suits. It's necessary in a lot of ways. There was a good deal of recruitment and evangelizing that had to go on and there's a certain type of person who needs . . . And it's funny when you think about it, in retrospect, but it makes sense. It's one thousand years ago and someone wants you to believe in some new god, you want to know that he's got chops. He can turn water into wine sometimes, making instant food, making people walk on water.

Male respondent: "I'm not abandoning my God for one that's not as good."

Male respondent: Yes, right. "Your God probably does way cooler stuff than that." But seriously—

Male respondent: There's an element of that. Every person grew up with the mentality that magic was real and really without a context for scientific understanding for natural phenomenon and stuff like that. There's stuff that happens in the world, lightning, much more mysterious than turning water into wine. It's not outrageous to me that they would want to perpetuate these . . . and I don't want to make it seem like lies. I don't think anyone thought of it as being lies. I bet everyone really did, or many people anyway except for maybe some pretty advanced scholars thought of them as being true. Yes, for my personal opinion, probably only a tool, not to be taken as . . . For example, you think of the fish and loaves story, do you really think, was there magically more food, or did Jesus just get people to share? Maybe the sharing thing is what I would think and a little bit of exaggeration on both sides and all of a sudden you've got . . .

Male respondent: It could be fun to think about, though. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: I think, though, that the things like that, the supernatural, the hard to believe, the miracles, I think those exist. I don't believe they're true. But I think they exist. I think they're important because, like I said, the symbol of Jesus and how that can change people's behaviors as they strive to be like that and whatever path that takes through their actions. I think a big part of that is the faith and the fact that they don't know for sure if it happened, but they believe it did. They're putting their faith in it. They didn't see it. That's how they can show their faith. They tell it to themselves, but telling it to other people, they're showing they can put their faith in something that they're not sure about. I think they're one of the more— you don't have faith, you just rot in my opinion. You don't have faith if you just follow somebody's teachings. That's just following an example. But to put your faith in them is to believe something that you don't know for sure. It's like a sports hero or something like that. You create this image of them and then if you go and meet them and they're an a***** to you, then you know that myth is busted and you don't have that faith in them that you used to because you see more of the truth. Obviously you don't have a time machine, you can't go back and fact check.

Male respondent: Believe in what you can't prove. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: Right. That's a big part of people's—change behavior—path that they take is how strong do they really believe what everybody else wants to tell them is false, or a lot of people tell them is false.

Male respondent: What I'll say is, I guess I'll say this as an *(0:42:51.8 unclear)* that faith, or the faith aspect of Christianity could be . . . in some cases it's one of the more admirable parts of it, but it's also quite possibly the most dangerous. You're not always following somebody you should have faith in, meaning the people that are guiding and forming your teachings. It's also probably what, I'll stick with me personally, but turns off the most people by far is this faith and this nonwillingness to accept others who don't have the same faith or beliefs as you. Whether it's evolution, or anything. It's just very hard for people who don't share your faith to understand why it is that you would keep insisting that something you can't prove is true, contrary to, be it common sense or intuition or natural evidence. It makes it awfully hard for some people to get along with the people with the faith.

Male respondent: Can I . . . ?

Male respondent: Go ahead, I'm done.

Male respondent: I'd like to springboard off that because I think it's really interesting that it's like the cornerstone of Christian faith, maybe in most religions. I say that Christians really experience a validation of their faith. Almost every good Christian, as in devout Christian, I know has experienced what they believe, and maybe I'm not here to say whether or not—but they experience this true validation of the faith, like God will provide. Oh, there, he did. They'll talk to Christians about it and they'll say, "See, this is proof." And other Christians will say, "Yes, it is." And they'll talk to another person about it and they'll be like, "No, it just worked out. Most things just work out." In your life, I'd

say, people just have experiences that they can define as being experientially related to that. It's just how you want to believe things in your life happen, if you ask me.

(0:45:00.2) WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE IT?

Male respondent: No, I don't experience it.

(0:45:03.0) WHEN ONE EXPERIENCES?

Male respondent: When one experiences it, yes.

(0:45:06.8) WHEN ONE ADDS VALUE TO IT?

Male respondent: (0:45:08.7 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: I'm not saying that it's not there. It's not there for me, but yes.

(0:45:18.5) WHAT WAS YOUR COMMENT?

Male respondent: I was going to say, to go off what he said, praying that you'll start to feel better, that your dad will feel better if he's in the hospital and they do. Is that science or because God listened to your prayers?

(0:45:36.7) IT'S ATTRIBUTION THEORY?

Male respondent: Yes.

Male respondent: Anecdotal. I don't think that's limited to Christianity.

Male respondent: All right.

Male respondent: It's all you.

Male respondent: It's all about (0:45:43.6 unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: It's all about whether or not your religion has an invested God or divested God.

Male respondent: Puppet master.

Male respondent: Is that what it was?

Male respondent: Yes. A marionette.

(0:46:28.0) WHY DO PEOPLE OBJECT TO ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY, THE RELIGION?

Male respondent: I think a real simple one that's a turnoff; they're just a bunch of rules. A bunch of rules. There are a bunch of rules.

(0:46:34.8) THERE'S A BUNCH OF RULES?

Male respondent: Yes.

(0:46:38.4) EXPLAIN.

Male respondent: If you're in an organized group, then 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 can't listen to certain music. Depending on which group you're in, the rules can be different, but there's a lot of them.

Male respondent: I guess, for me, one of the things of the whole turnoff is where it started. Not the actual faith started but the religion, the orthodoxy of it. For me, I'm Episcopalian, Anglican Church. Mine started basically because, the way it's most boiled down to is, a king wanted to get a divorce and he was just like, "Okay, I'll start my own." It's 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.

(0:47:47.8) ANYONE ELSE HAVE AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY YOU FIND DISTASTEFUL?

Male respondent: You can't see it.

Male respondent: Evangelists. People who want to save me, or tell me how they're doing so well because they believe in Jesus. It makes me think that, "Wow, like, give yourself some credit. You're the one who worked out, or practiced every day so you could be in the NFL," whatever, "study hard, and that was you. Give yourself some credit, first of all. And B, 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 unless I just—"

Male respondent: It is kind of insulting. *(One respondent agreed.)* When somebody who you would otherwise be friends with, or may be friends with, is willing to be your friend but they're also saying, "Well, unless you accept what I believe, and I know that you're going to spend eternity in hell."

Male respondent: Yes, apropos hell is definitely on that list. *(Laughter.)* If you ask me, big turnoff for 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 respondent: You have the Zoroastrians to thank for that.

Male respondent: Good job, Zoroastrians.

Male respondent: "Let's just corrupt something, and something else flowers out of it."

Male respondent: You've got to deal with that brimstone sometimes. In the Catholic Church, pretty mild, hell is not a big part, generally, what Catholics (*0:49:39.0 unclear/low volume response*). They probably deal with hell every once in a while. I don't like that.

Male respondent: I thought hell was bigger in the Catholic Church than other churches. Is that not right?

Male respondent: I never much about it.

Male respondent: Episcopalian, it's basically an off-branch of Catholicism, hell is the absence of God pretty much for us. It's not really the fire and brimstone thing. It's more of a, not a purgatory, but you're not with God and you're not with the people that believe in Jesus as your Savior.

Male respondent: Some of the Southern Baptists, the Evangelicals that I used to be with, you're literally on fire, you're in a lake of fire. You're being stabbed with pitchforks. They got literal with that stuff. I'm right there with exactly what Andrew said. Well, both Adam and Andrew in terms of you've got fact and you've got faith. If somebody could come prove to me that I'm wrong and they're right, I'd actually go, "Oh, thank you." But in the absence of fact, I'm dealing with their faith versus my faith and it's a matter of, "Stop being a jerk and beating me over the head with your faith. You want to have a conversation, that's great. I'm not going to tell you you're an idiot or a liar or stupid. I'm interested."

(0:50:54.1) ANY OTHER ELEMENTS THAT YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE?

Male respondent: To rephrase what you guys were getting at, it's like that willful blindness and being arrogant about how willfully blind you can be about a number of things.

(0:51:11.4) GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE.

Male respondent: The earth, sorry.

Male respondent: Yes, it's any scientific fact.

Male respondent: The earth is the center of the universe. (*One respondent agreed.*) Women are inferior to men. (*One respondent agreed.*)

Male respondent: The planet's four thousand years old. (*One respondent agreed.*)

Male respondent: It's the same thing with the inconsistencies and hypocrisies. (*One respondent agreed.*)

(0:51:30.7) CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

Male respondent: Okay. Inconsistencies would be, if you read the Bible, you'd see passages that conflict with each other. If this is supposed to be the word of God, then that's a problem. Hypocrisies? 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, who are stealing money. I don't know, all kinds of things like that.

Male respondent: Can I give you another hypocrisy? One of the central teachings is to be nonjudgmental. But what I find is, and this is a hypocrisy of Christians more so than religion, or at least the doctrine. What I find is some of the most judgmental people I've ever known have been Christians. In the name of Christianity as well.

(0:52:31.4) JUDGING WHAT?

Male respondent: Behavior, judging everything about a person—

Male respondent: Lifestyle as a religion. *(One respondent agreed.)* I've got to say the biggest turnoff actually is not anything to do with Christianity at all. It's the community, man. If you're a Christian, you're part of the Christian community, and I don't want to be a part of it. If I boil down Christianity to two lines of philosophy like, "Yes, sure. I'll sign up for that." I'll go visit customers as part of my job and sometimes I'll see a passage from the Bible literally carved into the stone in the side of the building and it's just like, "Wow, these people would probably really love me if we had a personal conversation."

Male respondent: I guess as I'm growing up and not a kid anymore and you really start to make these decisions. The thing that's most prominent right now that you see 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 ten years, but obviously longer than that. I had a gay uncle. 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 respondent: There's people starving *(0:54:17.4 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: That's the willful blindness, the evangelists, the rules, the hypocrisy. That's all of that. Not everybody, obviously, but the most outspoken ones are making their stand on that?

Male respondent: One of the passages that people talk about is Sodom and Gomorrah and what happens right after Sodom and Gomorrah 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. 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 respondent: Being politically affiliated to the Christian Right and so forth.

(0:55:07.1) WHAT ABOUT THAT BOTHERS YOU?

Male respondent: 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. I believe that's true, and I believe it's a really valuable part of our system of government. 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.

(0:55:44.5) WHY SHOULDN'T THEY?

Male respondent: It's a tough issue because if you have a group of people that share similar beliefs—

(0:55:57.6) HOLD THAT THOUGHT.

Male respondent: 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 respondent: Legislating morality, I think that's what you're looking at, you're thinking about. The issue with morality becomes the law of the land. I think that religion and politics has a big place in trying to present those things to the large masses.

Male respondent: The only thing I think about that, though, is that's in a way, and it's not 100 percent, but people who live by a certain philosophy, they're still going to vote that way. It's not really wrong for them to influence. I get what you're saying. *(One respondent agreed.)* It's annoying.

Male respondent: That's why that's a tough one. *(One respondent agreed.)* It's very tough.

Male respondent: But, on the other hand, churches don't pay taxes either. They shouldn't be lobbying the government. You shouldn't be making laws with respect to religion either.

Male respondent: Giving preference to a religion. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: The big thing that always comes to mind is 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 put what the consensus of scientists think in religious class. *(One respondent agreed.)* It's really hard for me when you've got Bobby Jindal saying, "Okay we're going to pay for you to have vouchers to private schools so that you can learn about . . ." I'm not saying people don't have the right to teach their kids what they want, but in public schools, you can't dilute the scientific consensus. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: Maybe you should be allowed to take your kid out of science class if you find it offensive or something.

Male respondent: You can see how technologically backwards Saudi Arabia is. A country where religious influence does dominate schools. You don't want that. You don't want that for us. They're pouring millions of dollars in every day now just to get up to speed. They don't have any PhDs learning science?

(0:58:23.7) ANY OTHER ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE?

Daniel: We talked about most of them already. You talked about gay marriage, but I don't think any of them actually approve of anybody being gay anyway.

Male respondent: There are a lot of other Christian groups that do, yes, for sure.

Daniel: Well, groups, but—

Male respondent: Maybe not the bigger ones, the bigger organized ones. Yes.

Daniel: Yes, we've talked about most of everything that I would think of.

Male respondent: Episcopalians do.

Male respondent: Yes, United Church of Christ, there's some. It's, "Let's hit people over the head with hate."

(0:59:08.0) CHRISTIANS ARE HYPOCRITES?

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

Male respondent: I wouldn't say they're especially hypocritical. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male respondent: That's something that—

Male respondent: I think that's something that turns everybody off to anything, because honestly when you said you see a lot of hypocrisy in the leaders of bigger Christian things. I understand at a certain point, yes, when it comes to many things, if you're going to preach a certain thing you really can't go back on it. I know it's not right to do something, but if I do it that doesn't invalidate me saying it's not right. You know what I mean? On a lot of things, yes, the hypocrisy is a huge issue because there have been huge scandals coming from it. But on certain things, with the amount of scrutiny a lot of these people are under it's hard for me to say . . . For example, in Tiger Woods's case or something like that where he cheated on his wife, if he were to come out before that and say, "Cheating on my wife is bad," and he ends up doing it, that's hypocrisy. We're not going to crucify the guy for it because we all make mistakes. We all can sometimes say one thing and then do something else. That's why hypocrisy, sometimes, with Christianity doesn't have as huge of an issue with me.

Male respondent: Just because there's hypocrisy everywhere?

Male respondent: Yes. Not just because there's hypocrisy everywhere, but I think it's almost impossible for a person to not be some type of hypocrite.

Male respondent: That's not really the hypocrisy I was speaking about, the ones where you would have a moral structure set up in your life either based around your belief systems of religion or what your parents taught you, or what you developed on your own and you went back on them. I guess by a

certain definition that would be hypocrisy, but I'm talking in this context more about the blatant hypocrisy. The blatant, "I'm doing this and knowing what I'm doing is completely opposite of what I should be doing, and doing it consistently and regularly to further myself."

(1:01:26.3) IS THERE A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE?

Male respondent: Priests sexually abusing children.

Male respondent: There you go.

Male respondent: When the Focus on the Family leader came out as a homosexual and a porn addict, that was a little bit obnoxious, maybe a little hypocritical.

Male respondent: Ted Haggard; remember him?

Male respondent: Yes. Ted Haggard.

Male respondent: He was the Evangelical president.

Male respondent: Yes, the president of the American Evangelical Council.

Male respondent: But does anyone think that—I personally don't think that there's anything inherently contradictory about Christianity. I'd be curious if anyone disagrees. *(1:01:59.7 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: If you actually believe that religion is applied, as opposed to . . .

Male respondent: *(1:02:03.5 Unclear/multiple speakers)*. Yes, yes.

Male respondent: *(1:02:04.0 Unclear/multiple speakers)* separate the New Testament from the Old Testament and you take it just Gospel *(1:02:08.7 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: Forgetting about the Old Testament. I'm referring to the New Testament.

Male respondent: Yes, I don't see a contradiction. It's only when you start taking post-Gospel writers, or New Testament versus Old Testament.

Male respondent: Contradiction, you're talking about, in the basic belief system?

Male respondent: Yes. No, like hypocrisy—

Male respondent: In the writings, in the teachings? *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male respondent: If someone said, "You're a Christian," I would say, "Oh, you're only probably a hypocrite, but not definitely." And no more so than anyone else would be.

(1:02:37.2) HOW IS HYPOCRISY DIFFERENT IN CHRISTIANITY THAN ELSEWHERE?

Male respondent: I think basically everyone is a hypocrite. I've met a couple of people who I don't think are at all. Everyone has a belief structure that you love to live by and you don't, you fall down. It's the point of having a belief structure, as a higher aspiration tends to be.

Male respondent: (1:03:02.6 Unclear/multiple speakers)---

Male respondent: I'm sorry.

Male respondent: Maybe people react to hypocrisy among Christians because they seem to be the ones shouting the loudest, telling people how to live their lives. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male respondent: To me, it's when people don't just say, "I believe this, personally," but, "You need to do this. *(Several respondents agreed.)* And yet I'm not going to." That's the problem.

Male respondent: Those were the two points I was going to make. You took the words right out of my mouth. People shout from the rooftop saying one thing and doing another and then all of a sudden impose their judgment or will upon you. I want to be forthright; you're setting yourself up to be a target from everybody else. Then also when you do something wrong it's going to be pointed out, just with more vigor, I guess. Or much more light shone on it.

Male respondent: 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. Divinity has got my back." They'll just justify it with that every time. It's whoever is going to make their preferences, point at somebody else and take the other finger and point at divinity. That's present, I'm sure, in every religion. Christianity in the United States of America is especially notorious for that.

(1:04:16.8) REALLY?

Male respondent: Oh, yes. Who is more notorious for that?

Male respondent: There might be more but you don't hear about it. Christians in the news.

Male respondent: You can get thrown in jail for being gay in Africa.

Male respondent: Because of the Christians there.

Male respondent: (1:04:32.6 Unclear/multiple speakers) a lot worse when you're outsourcing your hate to religion. *(One respondent agreed.)* Whatever the social elements of your society are and then you piggyback on religion and let them do the dirty work for you, basically. *(One respondent agreed.)* That happens a lot. We're just talking about America here, but yes, it's all over.

(1:04:52.1) WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE YOU HAD THAT HAVE ENGAGED ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY YOU DISAGREE WITH?

John: I was clubbing in my early twenties in Dallas. I'm a gay man, so I was at a gay club area in Oak Lawn and there was a group of Christians who came down there for some street theater to show us how we were living in sin and that was going to end in our destruction and whatnot. By the time we were done talking, I had half a dozen of them ask me to pray for them because they felt like I had a better understanding of Christianity. Even though they still felt me being gay was living in a state of sin and they couldn't reconcile it, they weren't really sure, but they still thought I was more deeply spiritual than them so please pray for them. That's a person whose spirituality and religious practice are so broken that they can't be reconciled.

(1:05:56.1) ANYONE ELSE?

Daniel: To be honest with you, the reason I don't have a lot to say is because my experience is the absence of this period. I grew up in Austin. A lot of people here are pretty liberal and they leave you alone about things. My whole life, religion was something that I had heard about and learned when I was younger and then never had to deal with again. My parents didn't harass me about it, my friends didn't harass me about it. I thought it amusing because I had six friends switch religions on me. I went with all of them to learn about the new religion that they switched to. Going from being Hindu to Catholic. Before her baby was born her mother threw her out of the house because of it, but she just loved the way the Catholics were, so she wanted to be Catholic. 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. Does that make sense? I don't know if any of you all are quite where I'm at. The only reason why I'm probably here at all is because there are things that I can't explain in the world and so I leave the door just slightly cracked open to say . . . obviously I don't know everything. We can't explain everything, so maybe there's something going on out there that I don't know about.

Male respondent: It's cool that you know that you don't know.

Daniel: Yes. 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. *(Sniffs.)* I'm sorry, I've got a cold, that's another reason I haven't said too much. But do you all understand what my perspective is now?

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

Daniel: Being that I've been in the "Austin bubble," I've been told so many times from everybody that comes here from other places, it's very different for me. It's like somebody handed me a book once a long time ago; I read it. Guess what? I've read lots of books and when I've put them down I've never thought about them again. I went to a club once, which is church. I've been in a lot of clubs and participated in a lot of them and then once I was done with them I left them and moved on to a new club and did something different. All it was was things that I learned. It's like certain types of math. The job that I do now doesn't have anything to do with it, but I learned it once. I can remember it and I can

maybe compare it to other things in the future when somebody asks me questions about it or says, “Can you help me explain something” or whatever. It’s very unnecessary, and religious people frighten me.

(1:08:49.6) WHY?

Daniel: Being a gay male also, and not agreeing with a whole lot of the things that people do in the name of religion and 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. Well, I’m not afraid, but I am afraid of you because you believe in something that could harm me eventually. I have a couple of friends that are similar to me, not many, and we have dinner together sometimes and we joke about . . . we say things to each other sometimes, when we see some religious people doing something or whatever and we can agree together, that we’re like, “That makes me afraid. I’m really afraid” because of the things that they do in the name of religion, or because of something they were taught that has to do with religion. That’s why I don’t say too much, because I’m just sort of like, “Uhh . . .” And I work for a Catholic company who does a lot of really great things; spends half a billion dollars a year doing charity care. I don’t believe in the Catholic religion or practice anything. I’m also gay. They leave me alone. A lot of people I work with in that company know this. Seton went, well anyway, I work for Seton if you didn’t already know. They even went the extra mile, for instance, to go outside of the Catholic faith and manage to cover, basically, domestic partnerships for insurance. They call it a legal domicile beneficiary. In other words, you can have one other adult that’s not your child in your house who you can give insurance to. Why do you think they did that in this city?

Male respondent: Did they just do it here?

Daniel: We are only here.

Male respondent: Oh, okay.

Daniel: We are part of a larger organization who, who knows, may try to drum down something, but they didn’t drum that out apparently, when we joined them many years ago. This is the bubble I live in, and I like my bubble. I have no reason to go outside of it for any kind of faith. Where people have faith I can honestly say I have hope. It would be really nice if there is something after this world. But I don’t care if there is because it’s not going to change the way I live my life now.

Male respondent: And you can’t change that fact.

Daniel: Yes, that’s right, it’s beyond me. I can’t change it, so why would I care about it? It would be caring that I’m Mexican or something and hating the fact that I was born that way. There’s nothing I can do about it, so I don’t pay any attention to it. (1:11:35.1 *Unclear*) waste time because we all do different things that we love; some people love religion. I choose to spend my time doing other things. Not to threaten the ranks or anything like that but my way of thinking, I think, is having a lot more of an effect on the people around me than their ways of thinking has on me. I don’t have anything to be afraid of as far as that goes.

Male respondent: No club in your hand.

Daniel: What?

Male respondent: I said, no club in your hand to beat them over the head with. (*One respondent agreed.*) People are more accepting of that.

(1:12:04.0) ANY OTHER EXPERIENCES?

Male respondent: I grew up in Dallas, inside of Dallas. A very conservative area. Religion wasn't really talked about a lot because most everybody in my neighborhood and that I went to high school with and things like that either went to church or probably didn't go to church. We just didn't really talk about it a lot. I didn't have a lot of experience. I read a lot, but I didn't have a lot of experience of meeting people from different religions. Even if I did, I didn't really know it just because we didn't talk about it. It wasn't something that you brought up in polite conversation. Politics, religion, and how much you make were not something you talk about. When I got to college I joined a fraternity, met one of my pledge brothers, and he's from Long Island. He's Jewish, his whole family is Jewish, they all stay Kosher, all these things. I was thinking about it, he's a really good friend of mine and I was just thinking about it. 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.

(1:13:20.9) HE'S NOT GOING TO HEAVEN.

Male respondent: Yes, exactly. That's one of my personal experiences.

(1:13:28.1) ANYONE ELSE?

Male respondent: I can go with the more later thing. Day-to-day life. I understand that there are 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 anymore, 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 probably all have to agree whether they are okay or not. The Christians are going way beyond that, and this gets into the politics and defining what is okay and what's not okay for people to do. I just think that's nuts.

(1:14:19.9) CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR LEGISLATING—

Male respondent: Legislating morality.

Male respondent: Legislating morality. They've gone way beyond what I want the government deciding. I think it's almost entirely, I could be wrong, but almost entirely the Christian influence in government.

(1:14:41.2) IS IT CHRISTIANITY USING POLITICS OR POLITICS USING CHRISTIANITY?

Male respondent: (1:14:59.0 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: It's both, without a doubt.

Male respondent: Exactly, yes.

Male respondent: Politicians use the affiliations to get into a different base of people to use. The people use the politicians to get things enacted like the blue laws that we used to have in Texas; not being able to buy liquor on Sundays. It used to be whole sections of grocery stores you couldn't go into.

Male respondent: Still can't. (Two respondents agreed.)

Male respondent: Some counties where you can't even buy liquor at all.

Male respondent: You didn't used to be able to buy cat litter on Sundays. (One respondent agreed.) They relaxed that. (One respondent agreed.)

Male respondent: What?

Male respondent: Yes, yes.

Male respondent: (1:15:28.7 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: The Bible Belt. Blue laws, technically you could only buy food or medical-oriented things. South Carolina, when I lived there, was a lot the same way; that was twenty years ago here.

Male respondent: Sunday. (One respondent agreed.)

Male respondent: That's where any organized religion (1:15:44.7 unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: (1:15:48.1 Unclear/multiple speakers) especially gross is when—

Male respondent: (1:15:50.0 Unclear/low volume response).

Male respondent: The highest members of the echelon of any organized religion just take a bunch of peoples' personal faith and turn it into a numbers game. It's just a product. (Several respondents agreed.) It's just this thing they can barter and trade to get whatever they want.

Male respondent: 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 and '70s and '80s the three demons were homosexuality, abortion, and Communism.

Male respondent: Communism.

Male respondent: Yes. All of the speeches, most of which were written by other people before the big evangelists like Oral Roberts and people like that, all dealt with those three topics. They've had to re-shift the focus since Communism fell. They have to, it seems like, push on those things so that they can

get people whipped up to give them something whether it's faith, following money, or whatever so that they can then show power to get politicians to enact what they want.

Male respondent: One other thing, 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. It's not on our list.

(1:17:11.8) ITS NOT THERE, BUT ITS RIGHT HERE: MONEY.

Male respondent: To me, I don't know whether that's hypocrisy or what that is, but it doesn't seem right. There's a whole list of problems. They're nonprofits but they're raising money. The whole cycle, and then using it for political influence.

Male respondent: Playing into the acceptance of God.

Male respondent: 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. Am I right on that?

Male respondent: Yes. In the focus on it over something.

(1:17:48.7) IS THIS SOMETHING THE CHRISTIAN WORLD DOES?

Male respondent: No.

Male respondent: Buddhism teaches against attachment. Jesus talked about it was easier for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than—

Male respondent: A camel.

Male respondent: A camel pass through the eye of a needle than . . . yes, it's talking to attachments to me. It's becoming focused on what I shouldn't be as opposed to what I should be.

Male respondent: But Christians are really good at it.

Male respondent: 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 to have church in a palace? That's bothersome.

Daniel: That's why I can honestly say my company is very . . . I wouldn't work there given my viewpoints if I didn't believe in what they do every day with the money that they make.

Male respondent: There's ones that try to practice. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Daniel: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*) Oh, yes. They raise money and all they do is build more buildings in order to service more people who are underinsured or uninsured.

(1:19:02.5) THAT'S A CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION.

Daniel: Mm-hmm. (*Affirmative.*) I work for an organization that does that, not believing, not caring. My business cards have a mission statement on the back, and so I hand these things out to people for when I'm working or whatever, and I laugh at the same time. I do believe in what they talk about because what they are doing is exactly what they're preaching, which is, "We take in money, we turn it right back around to service the health care needs of people. Nobody profits from that." A lot of people don't know, but a lot of our executive leadership, vice presidents and presidents, they are nuns. They take their salary and they immediately return it to the organization.

Male respondent: When organizations do that, it's like, "Okay, I don't really have a problem with it." (*One respondent agreed.*)

Daniel: It doesn't always work that way.

Male respondent: More conservative than me, talking about they're afraid of the spread of conservative Islam in parts of the world with the building of new madrasas, and I'm like, "You're sending your kid to this private Christian school that talks against evolution and preaches that creationism is a more valid science. So, how is this school you're sending your kids to not this conservative madrasa, just within your faith? Why is it that you have a problem with one and not the other?"

(1:20:15.3) ARE THERE ANY OTHER INAPPROPRIATE WAYS THAT CHRISTIANITY DEALS WITH MONEY?

Male respondent: When they influence politics.

Male respondent: It's like any organization. I think you're getting away a little bit from Christianity, this topic. This just boils down to organizations with oversight, and organizations without oversight.

(1:20:38.5) THAT'S WHY I ASK IF THIS IS CHRISTIANITY UNIQUE.

Male respondent: No.

Male respondent: Okay, speak to the Catholic paradigm, right? The Catholic Church, it's very hierarchical and that upsets a lot of people and justifiably so, but in a lot of ways there's a lot of oversight in the Catholic Church, right? Graft, like money s*** is pretty taken care of in the Catholic Church. There's always some higher-up who can look at what money comes in and goes out and you can get toasted. I'm sure there's graft, and I'm sure there's people who don't report it and all that, it's cash. But then there's people without oversight, and obviously there's huge problems with the Catholic Church. If you don't have oversight and you have access to a lot of money, it's amazing how good people can be tempted by that. They don't think like, "I'm going to embezzle money from the church." They think, "Oh, I can inflate my salary a little bit this month. Oh, I can buy this car and put it down as a car that the church owns and just drive it around, even though it's a Lambo." That kind of thing.

Male respondent: I don't know if I have as much of a problem with churches, any single establishment, like buildings, not the church or a sect of Christianity necessarily, acting like businesses so much because I think when you think about it—Seton could build tons more hospitals if they were absolute minimalist hospitals, but could they get the best doctors to come there?

Male respondent: The hospitals shouldn't be minimalist; their churches could be.

Male respondent: At the same time, if you're trying to raise money to go on these mission trips, are you going to raise more money bringing in people who are going to pay more dues and bring a lot more people to a bigger church or a little tent?

Male respondent: It's what they *(1:22:24.8 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: I do agree that there's a lot of money spent on the wrong things, whether it's salaries or corruption, whatever that is. There is a lot of problem with that, but also to be able to do the good things, you have to bring in an extra amount of money.

Male respondent: The problem is they're trying to attract people. That's the problem. *(One respondent agreed.)* We want nice things.

Male respondent: Also, it's a problem that people buy into it as well, if they're not demanding the level of accountability—obviously that relationship is warped by, "You're my religious leader" and so on, "I've got to defer to you on a lot of stuff." But that's the fault of the parishioners, the congregants for not being smarter and maybe look more into it than just, "Is this a charismatic leader? What are they doing?" That's also the fault of everybody who buys into it and letting emotion . . . they play it up. That's not just Christianity, that's all type of investments.

(1:23:26.2-1:23:57.3) A LOT OF THIS DEFINES THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS JUDGMENTAL.

Male respondent: I have one that isn't, if that's where you're going with that.

(1:24:02.9) HOW JUDGMENTAL ARE YOU ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?

Male respondent: That's all we're doing, right? *(1:24:15.3 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: It's not like we're breaking into the Christians versus the Christian faith.

Male respondent: Yes, you asked us.

Male respondent: Yes, it's all your fault. *(1:24:25.1 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

(1:24:31.7) IS BEING JUDGMENTAL HUMAN NATURE?

Male respondent: Yes.

(1:24:48.3) IS THAT GOING TO HAPPEN EVERYWHERE?

Male respondent: I don't think you have to teach against something. Teaching against being judgmental like all types of upbringings do, they teach you to not judge people. I don't think that would be necessary if people weren't naturally judgmental.

Male respondent: I think you said earlier, it's a goal. It's not necessarily what we're able to do, it's what we're aspiring to.

Male respondent: There's also a difference between being naturally judgmental, as people are, and try not to be hopefully, I guess. There's a difference between being that and condemning someone for the judgments you've made upon them.

Male respondent: I don't think being judgmental is bad, personally. I think the way that most people think about it is bad. Yes, it's a constant. Like you said, it's human nature. We all look at somebody, we look at a situation, everything, you make judgments, and you make your decisions based on those judgments. If we didn't have any judgments, then you would just be an idiot, you wouldn't do anything for any reason.

Male respondent: No sense (1:25:53.5 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: Yes, you have to have some kind of understanding of what's going on, right?

Male respondent: You're making judgment calls, basically.

Male respondent: It's what you do with that judgment and taking other pieces of information through religion that can lead to very negative things. But it can also lead to very positive things. They're just completely dependent on how you take that information and put it into some kind of action.

Male respondent: To me, though, a judgment involves, there's a leap. There's a difference between being observant—a judgment is a little bit—

Male respondent: It's a moral (1:26:24.9 unclear/multiple speakers)—

Male respondent: It can be a very great inference. It can be as simple as, I don't know, like, "That dude has a farmer's tan so his legs are probably white too," but you don't actually know that. You don't actually know that.

Male respondent: Your definition (1:26:41.6 unclear/multiple speakers) it's having a set of information and then making a leap forward.

Male respondent: Yes. Yes that's my—even though sometimes it is—

Male respondent: Without knowing the rest of the information.

Male respondent: Sometimes it is perfectly logical, and obviously we have to make thousands and thousands of those calls every day probably, in some way or another. I would say, to me, a judgment has to be a leap some way.

Male respondent: But when I take that leap and then start condemning other people for it and telling them that they have to be as me, or else.

Male respondent: I'm not saying there are not judgments that are inappropriate. *(Laughter.)*

Male respondent: Yes. You've got that sliding scale where judgment goes from how to live life to how to harm others. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male respondent: I agree with that. I think that it's not necessarily wrong to think that someone should do something a certain way. *(One respondent agreed.)* Every philosopher, period, has done that. They've all thought that their way of thinking was the best way, or maybe not the best but what should people probably do. Anyone who is talking about morals is talking about how they think people should do things. The difference is when you start to go from, "I judge people should do this" to, "I judge people do this and unless they do, I think this is going to happen to them" or, "I'm going to do something to them," to the effect of *(1:28:02.2 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: I've met some people before, in life, who approach things more from the standpoint of, "This is what truth I feel like I've found for myself. I'm not going to tell you whether it's right or wrong because it works for me and that's as far as I'll go with it. If you like it and want to play around with it in your life, cool. Otherwise, don't worry about it." Yes, that's just sharing their own personal experience and that's, yay, do that all day long.

(1:28:26.1) SHARING IS GOOD. BEING JUDGMENTAL TRYING TO CATEGORIZE OR—

Male respondent: Demonize, penalize. Yes.

(1:28:38.2) LET ME ASK YOU ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS.

Male respondent: My old friends. They're not anymore.

(1:28:53.9-1:29:32.3 MODERATOR DEFINES "EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY" AND PRESENTS THEIR FOUR CORE BELIEFS: CONVERSION, ACTION, THE BIBLE, AND THE CROSS.)

Male respondent: The Bible is infallible. I didn't hear you say that, but that's one of the—

Male respondent: I thought that was coercion. Conversion, coercion, it's the same. *(Laughter.)*

Male respondent: It says that they believe that the Bible is the word. Okay.

(1:29:45.2-1:30:06.7 MODERATOR CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN THE CORE BELIEFS.)

(1:30:06.7) DO YOU KNOW WHAT "BORN AGAIN" IS?

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

(1:30:12.6) DO YOU NEED THAT DEFINED?

Male respondent: I'd like a definition.

Male respondent: Yes, actually I would, too.

(1:30:14.4-1:30:32.1 MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE CONCEPT OF BEING "BORN AGAIN.")

(1:30:32.1) IS THAT CLOSE TO WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND IT TO BE?

Male respondent: Yes, but even if it wasn't, you wouldn't be wrong. I just want to make sure that I'm on the same page with you, not that you're right. *(Laughter.)*

Male respondent: But you're right.

(1:30:59.9) TALK ABOUT CONVERSION AND BEING BORN AGAIN.

Male respondent: That means born again, conversion?

Male respondent: It sounds like to me that's not conversion, that's affirmation. Conversion, at least in this context especially, is I see as converting somebody else actively with the Bible and the cross. Going out there and converting others who disagree with you. Say if my friends or I was raised Christian and at some point I said, "I believe in Jesus," I wouldn't consider that being born again. I'm saying like affirming my faith in that process. But if they got me to say that, then they would have converted me. *(1:31:48.3 Unclear/multiple speakers)*. When I think of conversion, that's *(1:31:52.1 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

(1:31:53.7) CONVERSION IS THE TERM THEY USE WHEN SOMEONE HAS BEEN BORN AGAIN.

Male respondent: In the Evangelical Church, conversion, does that happen when you're a teenager?

Male respondent: It can happen at many ages within the church.

Male respondent: Whenever you accept it.

Male respondent: Yes, usually not until after an age of ability for moral consent or recognition.

Male respondent: In the Episcopalian Church we have confirmation, which is where you accept it. It's basically when you're baptized, your parents accept their responsibility to raise you as an Episcopalian.

Male respondent: Yes, there's a Jewish version of that too.

Male respondent: Then when you accept it, you're baptized? Is that right?

Male respondent: I was thirteen.

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

Male respondent: Well, if you were baptized before. In the Evangelical Church if you're raised from birth, you're not baptized until you have that moment of awareness of the difference between right and

wrong and sin, because until then you'll go to heaven, regardless. After that you have to be baptized and live truly, or go to hell.

Male respondent: Okay.

Male respondent: I think the conversion and the born again are the same thing. The conversion, even though someone else is pushing you towards it, it's still your acceptance of it. The affirmation is still your acceptance of it. Either way it's the same. The process may be different, but it's the same thing.

(1:33:05.8) YOU ARE BORN AGAIN WHEN YOU ACCEPT JESUS CHRIST.

Male respondent: Right.

(1:33:09.4) JESUS IS AN ISSUE, DUE TO SOME OF THE SUPERNATURAL THINGS.

Male respondent: The Evangelicals—

(1:33:17.4) BUT JESUS IS ALSO THE ASCENDED MASTER.

Male respondent: Yes.

Robert: 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. It sounds kind of cool. I guess it's pretty nice, I see the appeal. When it comes down, that's the fundamental edict—I was trying to think, what is it? I had this crazy thing awhile ago, what was it? It should be up there for my things that, but *(1:34:00.5 unclear)* Christianity, but the concept of grace being the door you have to open, accepting God's grace. "Okay, I accept God's grace. God is my savior. There's nothing I can do except accept him as giving me this grace." I can't buy it.

(1:34:16.7) WHAT'S NOT PLAUSIBLE ABOUT GRACE?

Robert: It's just not real. It's just not a thing. There's not something out there that cares about you that much, sorry. There can't be. There's not a benevolent sentience out there that cares about you, if you ask me. "Robert Fortenberry is special to a lot of people and matters just as much as anything else does, but not anymore." I just couldn't take that leap. I couldn't say, "Okay, I accept grace." When I realized that I was like, "Okay, well, that was that." That's why I couldn't be a Christian. That tied a lot of things for me, I just realized.

Male respondent: Making a big deal of that; the most important thing is that you just believe. You don't even think about it. You don't need to question it. Just believe it publicly.

Male respondent: Right, and they do it at this younger age. I didn't know what I was doing when I was twelve. 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 twenty-five.

Male respondent: That's reasonable.

(1:35:43.2-1:35:58.9 MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE SECOND CORE BELIEF: ACTION.)

Male respondent: That's more about 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 respondent: Do they define social justice?

(1:36:14.1) NO. IS THAT A BIG QUESTION?

Male respondent: That's quite a loaded term right there.

Male respondent: (1:36:15.9 Unclear/multiple speakers) because I don't—

Male respondent: Whose social justice?

Male respondent: 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 and 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.

(1:36:49.9) HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE WITH AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN?

Male respondent: They come to the campus a lot. I know people.

Male respondent: I have. (1:37:05.9 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: I've been asked if Jesus Christ is my personal Lord and Savior, if that's what that is. I didn't stick around to ask who they were with. That's evangelizing, isn't it?

Male respondent: This was in a Guitar Center.

(1:37:22.3) WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO SAY?

Daniel: Nothing other than whenever I would see the guys on the bicycles come by, our parents were like, "Shut the windows, *(laughter)* close the drapes. Turn off all the electricity. Just be silent and still."

(1:37:36.5) THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS ON BIKES?

Male respondent: The Mormons. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Daniel: It doesn't matter. I'm afraid of anybody on a bike with a book. *(Laughter.)* It's just like, "Run the other direction."

Male respondent: Lord of the Rings, you don't feel *(1:37:43.5 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Daniel: Better not take the chance at all.

(1:37:49.4) FROM WHAT YOU'VE HEARD OR EXPERIENCED, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE "SOCIAL JUSTICE" IS?

Male respondent: I've got to say, there may be a lot of things we haven't touched on. It's not all evangelizing. I did the soup kitchen thing with the Catholic Church. We went out and bugged people for food and gave them all stickers if they gave us food. Yay, good for you, write it off or something.

Male respondent: But it wasn't a condition that they surrender their faith, or whatever.

Male respondent: No. I'm just saying 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 marginalized a lot of the times. I'm happy they do soup kitchen runs like that.

Male respondent: Yes, I think that when we were studying, social justice is doing good for the less fortunate. Really basic, whether it's at home or in your community or in Africa, wherever. They're helping people out who are less fortunate. That's amazing and that's great that you're voluntarily doing that, that's what we need. 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, it's 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 as important.

Male respondent: The social justice that I was taught about in Evangelical churches gets into stuff 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 was considered social justice. I have serious issue with things like, "Let's commit murder to save people." It's like, "Wait a minute, something's wrong here."

(1:40:05.4) GOOD SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS LIKE SOUP KITCHENS, HELPING PEOPLE—

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

Male respondent: It's hard to argue against.

(1:40:16.4) WHAT ELSE?

Male respondent: Any kind of charity. Anything you do for somebody in need.

(1:40:21.0) WHEN YOU WERE IN DIFFERENT GROUPS, YOU ALL USED TO DEAL WITH SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

Male respondent: Yes. *(One respondent agreed.)* We had a boxing tournament to raise money. It was the biggest party of the year. We raised \$130,000.

Male respondent: Cool.

Male respondent: We raised—

Male respondent: I don't remember any of it, but I know we raised a lot of money.

Male respondent: We have a field day with kids here, the Boys and Girls Club of Austin. We have a little field day, bring out about two hundred kids and partner them up with some of our members, and we gave them *(1:40:52.5 unclear/multiple speakers)* \$10,000.

(1:40:53.2) THERE IS SOCIAL JUSTICE OUT THERE?

Male respondent: Well, yes. You brought up the idea of Evangelical Christianity. Are you talking about social justice from the perspective of the Evangelical Christians, or social justice in Christianity in general?

Male respondent: That's what social justice—

Male respondent: I thought all this was Evangelical—

Male respondent: *(1:41:07.1 Unclear/multiple speakers).*

(1:41:07.9) THIS IS ALL ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS.

Male respondent: Okay.

(1:41:11.4) I WANT TO KNOW HOW IT FITS.

Male respondent: What the Assembly of God and the various Pentecostal groups and all those call social justice is not a large portion of what's being described here. It's justification of negative behavior. There's a little bit of it, maybe 10 percent, that's the soup kitchens like you were talking about your Catholic Church doing, and that's fantastic. Building schools in impoverished areas, that's fantastic.

(1:41:32.6) THAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE, YOU HAVE BEEN THERE.

Male respondent: I can't say that something is wrong with it. Yes, this is what we were taught. It's just like, "You people are out of your freaking minds." It's okay to hook up electrodes to twelve-year-olds because you think that they might be a little too effeminate, or something like that. *(1:41:51.3 Unclear/multiple speakers).*

Male respondent: Can I ask you a question? Were there any charitable things in—

Male respondent: It got so foc—

(1:42:00.7) I WANT YOU TO ASK THAT QUESTION WHEN WE'RE DONE. I WANT TO COVER THESE.

Male respondent: Yes.

(1:42:12.6-1:42:20.0 MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE CORE BELIEF OF THE BIBLE AS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY.)

(1:42:20.0) HOW DOES THAT FIT IN WITH YOUR IMAGE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS?

John: It definitely fits in 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 of Evangelical Christians take the entire, I'm generalizing here, they take it literally. I can't do that.

(1:43:04.8) ANYONE ELSE HAVE ANY THOUGHTS?

Male respondent: 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 *(1:43:24.3 unclear/multiple speakers)*.

(1:43:25.3-1:43:46.8 MODERATOR EXPLAINS THE FOURTH CORE BELIEF OF THE CROSS.)

Male respondent: Evangelicals think that?

Male respondent: Yes.

Male respondent: I'd say that was true.

Male respondent: It does sound like, you hear it. Evangelicals all the time say, "He died for your sins" whatever, some sort of guilt ploy, or something like that.

Male respondent: But if it's that core tenet of the belief, then why is it at the bottom of the list?

(1:44:04.7) THAT'S JUST HOW I WROTE IT.

Male respondent: Oh. *(Laughter.)* It doesn't offend me, I'm thinking in terms of where it is.

(1:44:16.6-1:44:44.0) WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE AND STILL BELIEVE ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS, AND WHERE ARE THEY ON THE LANDSCAPE OF ALL THOSE DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN GROUPS?

Male respondent: I don't know. This is my personal belief. That being said, 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 falling down there. But from everything, and I watch the news all day every day at work, I read a lot. As far as groups that scare me more than a little, and cause to happen that I don't want to have happen.

(1:45:24.3) WHAT IS THE REASON EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY SCARES YOU?

Male respondent: They're not out to blow up the world.

Male respondent: First of all—

(1:45:41.5) THEY'RE UP THERE WITH THE EXTREMISTS?

Male respondent: They have an awful lot of power, and they're using it in a way that I don't think any group should be using it.

(1:45:51.3) WHAT WAY?

Male respondent: 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 that's extreme and that's the radical people in the group.

(1:46:24.3) IS THERE A PARTICULAR PERSON OR GROUP YOU ARE REFERRING TO?

Male respondent: Whether it's high-level Republican leaders, or whether it's the talk show, whatever, people you listen to with their extreme views, judging others.

Male respondent: Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Ted Haggard.

Male respondent: Oh, Westboro Baptist *(1:46:51.8 Unclear/multiple speakers)*.

Male respondent: Tim Tebow.

Male respondent: Tim Tebow. *(Laughter.)*

(1:46:55.5) IS HE AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN?

Male respondent: I don't know.

Male respondent: He might be.

Male respondent: He probably is. Isn't he? He talks about it enough to be.

Male respondent: (1:46:59.8 Unclear/multiple speakers) the number of people (1:47:00.9 unclear/multiple speakers).

Daniel: They have an influence over so many people that just tune out reason and go with blind faith that they, to me, have a scary amount of power.

(1:47:13.6) ANYONE ELSE?

Male respondent: It is like radical Muslims in that there's no talking to them. Nothing is up for discussion.

Male respondent: The reward that they're promising, whether it's seventy-two 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. There's this amazing reward that's being crafted, whether it's two thousand years or 1,300 years, this payoff, 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.

(1:48:00.5) DO YOU FEEL EVANGELICALS ARE DIFFERENT FROM PRESBYTERIANS OR METHODISTS?

Male respondent: I do.

Male respondent: I think that they—

(1:48:10.8) YOU HAVE THEM POSITIONED QUITE FAR APART.

Male respondent: I think one of the things that was talked about for Evangelicals in the definition was spreading the word. That was mentioned a lot. Whereas perhaps the form of the other groups, other sects, is to keep to themselves about it, kind of 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—

(1:48:50.5) YOU DON'T HAVE TO JUSTIFY IT.

Male respondent: It's just that's what they're doing, That's why they're the biggest target, but also the most influential as well.

(1:48:58.8) WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS?

Jamie: 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 and then therefore can get the clout, unfortunately, that we give them. That's my point of view on that.

Robert: 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 certain, maybe other Christian groups. 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. I even know a few scientist Evangelicals. I really have to ask them—geologists, who believe the earth is six thousand years old. Yes. I work in the petroleum department in the University of Texas. As individuals I really have to learn to take it with a grain of salt, just as much as they find out whether I'm agnostic or atheist or whatever they find out about me. A lot of them didn't change their behavior towards me, perceptively. So I try to extend that courtesy to them.

(1:50:44.3-1:51:24.0 MODERATOR PRESENTS THE NEXT EXERCISE: WHAT WOULD YOU TELL SOMEBODY WHO SAID THEY WERE VISITED BY AN EVANGELICAL FRIEND AND ASKED TO GO TO THAT CHURCH?)

(1:51:24.5 Moderator leaves the room.)

(1:51:24.5-1:54:38.5 Respondents hold multiple simultaneous conversations, mostly off topic.)

Male respondent: I'm going to come up with a T-shirt now that says something like, "I've been saved through a process of coercion."

Male respondent: I would ask that person, did they invite you because they think you'll really like it or because you need it? That's what I would ask them.

Male respondent: Are they trying to save you?

Male respondent: I like knowing the different churches. I'm not really a religious person, but *(1:51:55.2 unclear/crosstalk)*. That's a different answer than most people are going to give. I would probably go.

Male respondent: Are they telling you because they're trying to figure out should I go or not? Then you've got to be like, well *1:52:35.2 unclear/crosstalk*."

Male respondent: Tape the whole thing and email it to me so I can thank you later if *(1:52:40.7 unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male respondent: Are you telling me this because you're worried what will happen to me?

Male respondent: My roommate *(1:52:46.1 unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male respondent: *(1:52:46.4 - 1:53:22.7 Unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male respondent: You can tell him that we'll go to Evangelical school as long as you come to mosque the next weekend, how about that? If they say yes . . .

Male respondent: I want to see them dancing around a fire naked worshipping the grey goddess or something.

Male respondent: That's what I'm talking, take them to a pagan . . .

Male respondent: That's going to be even more intimidating, but it has to be a female deity, because that's going to really screw with them.

Male respondent: With twenty t*** and five (1:53:43.9 *unclear/crosstalk*) and three arms.

Male respondent: Who is it? Demeter, that's the one.

Male respondent: (1:53:50.1 *Unclear/crosstalk*).

Male respondent: This is the real research right here.

Male respondent: (1:53:59.3 *Unclear/crosstalk*).

Male respondent: In college, the Mormons stopped coming around my house.

Male respondent: Why?

Male respondent: I would invite them in and have conversations with them and then I would go to their church and agree to discuss faith with them and I really got on their nerves, like I probably have you all.

Male respondent: Wait, this is supposedly for a book or something like that?

Male respondent: Yes, research.

Male respondent: I'd be so curious to be a fly on that wall and see what they were thinking about us.

Male respondent: I want to know who's writing the book, though.

Male respondent: (1:54:24.2 *Unclear/crosstalk*).

(1:54:26.6 *Moderator enters the room.*)

(1:54:38.5-1:55:23.3) UNDERSTANDING THAT WHAT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS BELIEVE AND CONSIDERING THEY WOULD STAY FAITHFUL TO WHAT THEY BELIEVE, WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO EXPERIENCE FROM THEM THAT WOULD HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THEM BETTER? YOU HAVE PUT THEM ON A PAR WITH PEOPLE WHO BLOW THINGS UP.

Male respondent: They do. (1:55:24.7 *Unclear/multiple speakers*).

Male respondent: They've been known to kill people. Oklahoma City.

(1:55:31.9) WHAT WOULD THEY NEED TO DO TO CHANGE YOUR OPINION?

Male respondent: I'd say they need to distance themselves from the more extreme members. I'm sure there are Evangelical Christians who don't believe in blowing things up.

Male respondent: Oh, yes. (1:55:48.8 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: I'm sure there are fundamental believers in Islam that don't believe violence is the answer. I think that they would need to distance themselves from that.

(1:56:01.2) ANYONE ELSE?

Male respondent: Yes, 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.)

Male respondent: (1:56:38.9 Unclear/multiple speakers).

Male respondent: If they could wear shirts we (1:56:39.7 unclear/multiple speakers)—

Male respondent: I was going to say to the same point. 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 respondent: They've got to really distance themselves from the rhetoric. The gay marriage thing comes to mind; there's other things too. The Christian Church has consistently been on the wrong side of history in terms of things like civil rights, and they really cannot afford to be so backwards looking if they want to be relevant. There's plenty of people of faith out there who are going to go find something else (one respondent agreed) that's not Evangelical, who would be good contributors to the movement.

(1:57:36.2) WHAT WOULD SHOW YOU THAT THEY HAVE STOPPED BEING BACKWARDS LOOKING?

Male respondent: 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. Planned Parenthood in Texas, whoa. 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 respondent: It happens.

(1:58:06.7) ANYONE ELSE?

Male respondent: I would say my only—not about the message that they're trying to send, but the message that they're trying to subvert by fighting Planned Parenthood and fighting sex education. If you think your ideas are right and you're willing to let them stand up to the other ideas, that's great. More

power to you. Then you're giving it, both sides, all three sides, however many sides you want to say, get their chance to be put on the table and then each person can choose that or that or that. They're preaching ignorance. They want children to be not taught something just because 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 respondent: 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 when they're telling their point of view to convince you, and you know that there isn't the slightest change that they're going to shift their views.

Male respondent: Because we could discover a gene for homosexuality tomorrow and I don't believe right now that the top leaders in the various Evangelical churches would stop saying it was a sin, they would just say, "Okay, God made you that way, but it's still a sin."

Male respondent: They'd have to start believing in genes first. *(Laughter.)*

Male respondent: Underlying, based on the four categories you have up there, that's more the conversion. More on the action, social justice and leading by example would help me. 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. Give a poster up there, give me some information, I'll make the choice. That's how it should be, I think. More on the action. Lead by example, do your social justice and I can see that, and with your information I'll be more willing, I think, to want to join and listen.

(2:00:30.3) TO WALK THE WALK?

Male respondent: Right.

(2:00:30.8) MAKE SURE I SEE.

Male respondent: Exactly

(2:00:35.9) ANYTHING ELSE?

Male respondent: *(2:00:38.9 Unclear/low volume response). (Laughter.)*

Male respondent: Maybe if they all seemed compassionate towards the people that they disagree with.

Male respondent: I'm sorry, what was that?

Male respondent: If they were compassionate with the people that they disagree with.

Male respondent: Yes, building a school in South America without building a church next to it. Do it because that's the right thing, not because it's also an opportunity to indoctrinate—

Male respondent: It's not good for business, though.

Male respondent: I would just love to see them accept science. Not just one area of it, but science in general.

Male respondent: The whole—

Male respondent: That would be an amazing thing because they could integrate with their faith and say that that's the way God made the universe. And I don't have an issue with that, but just accept science.

(2:01:23.2) AND THE DAY THEY DO?

Male respondent: The day they do, I'll welcome—

Male respondent: No, I would—

Male respondent: I would welcome them back into my home.

(2:01:36.8) ANYTHING ELSE?

Male respondent: I don't think so.

THANK YOU . . .