

What do Americans believe about God, salvation, ethics,

and the Bible? Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research partnered to find out. Every two years, we take the theological temperature of the United States to help Christians better understand today's culture and to equip the church with better insights for discipleship. Read some of our key findings from 2022 below and explore the data for yourself.

## Does God Change?

As we look at ourselves and at the world, it is clear that human beings, along with the rest of creation, undergo frequent changes. But does this principle of change apply to God as well?

The Bible affirms the truth that the triune God is both omniscient, meaning that He knows all things, and immutable, meaning that He cannot and does not change ([Isa. 46:10](#); [Mal. 3:6](#); [James 1:17](#); [1 John 3:20](#)). Despite this truth, the majority of adults in the United States believe that God both learns and adapts to different circumstances.

STATEMENT NO. 4

God learns and adapts to different circumstances.

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

51% agree vs. 32% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

Despite the clear teaching of Scripture, this year's survey reveals that approximately half of evangelicals believe that God learns and adapts to various situations, meaning that they believe that God *does* change.

STATEMENT NO. 4

God learns and adapts to different circumstances.

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

48% agree vs. 43% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

These results show that American evangelicals and the general U.S. population are essentially equivalent in their agreement with this statement. Nearly half of both groups believe that God changes by learning and adapting. This may indicate the influence of open theism (which denies God's complete knowledge of future events) and process theology (which denies God's omnipotence and asserts that He does undergo changes) within the evangelical church. This finding may also indicate a lack of clear, biblical teaching on the character of God in evangelical churches.

## Are We Born Innocent?

When God created the world, everything He made was good

([Gen. 1:10, 21, 25, 31](#)). Yet through Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden of Eden, humankind became corrupted. The Bible teaches the concept of original sin, which means that since the fall, every human being inherits a sin nature from the time of their conception ([Ps. 51:5](#); [Rom. 5:12](#)). In other words, we are not sinners because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinners.

STATEMENT NO. 15

Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

71% agree vs. 21% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

It is unsurprising that most U.S. adults believe that humans are born innocent, given the influence of humanistic philosophies and worldviews that teach self-determinism and a view of humankind as basically good.

STATEMENT NO. 15

Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

65% agree vs. 32% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

The fact that almost two-thirds of evangelicals believe that humans are born in a state of innocence reveals that the biblical teaching of original sin is not embraced by most evangelicals. God's Word, however, makes clear that all humans are "by nature children of wrath" ([Eph. 2:3](#)). This truth is foundational for an accurate understanding of the gospel and of our absolute need for the grace of God in salvation.

## Does Church Membership Matter?

Jesus says in [Matthew 16:18](#), "I will build my church." But what is the church? Biblically speaking, the church consists of those whom God has called out of the world and drawn to Himself through Christ. The universal church, which consists of every person past, present, and future whom God calls to Himself, is expressed tangibly through local church bodies that extend around the world.

STATEMENT NO. 24

**Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church.**

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

36% agree vs. 56% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

For much of American history, the influence of Christianity resulted in a high rate of church attendance, and church membership was normative. Yet increasing secularization in the United States has led to more Americans' identifying as nonreligious. In addition, the entrenched cultural value of individualism makes it unsurprising that most Americans deem church membership as optional for Christians.

STATEMENT NO. 24

**Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

68% agree vs. 26% disagree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

Given the Bible's assumption that those who claim to follow Christ will also join a local body of believers ([1 Cor. 5:12-13; 11:18; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:9; 1 Peter 5:1-5](#)), it may be surprising that only 68 percent of evangelicals view church membership as obligatory. This may indicate the influence of an individualistic worldview within the church, as well as challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ever-increasing access to viewing various churches' services via the internet.

## U.S. Adults: Trends

The State of Theology survey has been conducted every two years since our first

U.S. survey in 2014. Survey results over the past eight years reveal that Americans increasingly reject the Bible's divine origin and more readily embrace sexual behavior that is condemned in Scripture.

## The Bible

U.S. adults increasingly reject the divine authorship of the Bible, relegating it to the same category as other religious writings and purportedly sacred texts. This view makes it easy for individuals to accept biblical teaching that they resonate with while simultaneously rejecting any biblical teaching that is out of step with their own personal views or broader cultural values.

The Bible, however, is a unified message from the one true God. As such, it is to be embraced in all its fullness as God's perfect revelation to humankind (Prov. 30:5; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). We must conform our lives to Scripture rather than twist Scripture to suit our lives.

This is the clearest and most consistent trend revealed by the State of Theology survey since it began in 2014.

STATEMENT NO. 16

**The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true.**

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

2014: 41% agree  
2016: 44% agree  
2018: 47% agree  
2020: 48% agree  
2022: 53% agree

## Secularization

The Bible reveals to us God’s purposes and requirements for human relationships and sexuality. God created humans as male and female ([Gen. 1:27](#)), and He instituted marriage—a covenant relationship between one biological man and one biological woman—as the only appropriate place for sexual activity ([Heb. 13:4](#)).

Despite Scripture’s teaching on God’s will for human identity and sexual ethics, U.S. adults increasingly affirm the “right” of an individual to choose his or her own gender identity despite one’s biological sex. The surveys from 2016 to 2020 showed this view holding steady, but the 2022 survey reveals that it is gaining traction.

STATEMENT NO. 27

Gender identity is a matter of choice.

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

2016: 38% agree

2018: 38% agree

2020: 38% agree

2022: 42% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

Additionally, more and more Americans take the view that the Bible’s commands against homosexuality are no longer applicable in society today. While there has been some variability, 2022 reveals an overall increasing secular trend over the years.



STATEMENT NO. 28

The Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn't apply today.

**U.S. Adult Finding:**

2016: 42% agree

2018: 44% agree

2020: 40% agree

2022: 46% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

## U.S. Evangelicals: Trends

The 2022 survey results for U.S. evangelicals reveal concerning trends related to the exclusivity and deity of Jesus Christ, the historicity and divine nature of Scripture, objective truth, gender identity, and homosexuality. At the same time, encouraging trends include evangelicals' increasingly biblical views on abortion and sex outside of marriage.

### God

Key to orthodox Christianity is Jesus' own assertion that He alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life," and that "no one comes to the Father *except* through [Him]" ([John 14:6](#), emphasis added). Trends over time and the 2022 survey results reveal an increasingly unbiblical belief among evangelicals that God is pleased by worship that comes from those outside the Christian faith.

STATEMENT NO. 3

God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 48% agree

2018: 51% agree

2020: 42% agree

2022: 56% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

This year's survey also revealed a significant increase in evangelicals who deny Jesus' divinity. Such a belief is contrary to Scripture, which affirms from beginning to end that Jesus is indeed God ([John 1:1; 8:58; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:1-4](#)).

STATEMENT NO. 7

Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2020: 30% agree

2022: 43% agree

## Truth

Embracing the reality of objective truth is necessary to a right and proper understanding of the world. Scripture affirms that God is truth ([Num. 23:19](#); [John 1:14](#); [14:6](#); [16:13](#)), and because the Bible is His Word, Scripture is truth as well ([Ps. 119:160](#); [John 17:17](#); [2 Tim. 2:15](#)). Despite the testimony of Scripture, evangelicals increasingly believe that the Bible is not literally true.

STATEMENT NO. 16

**The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 17% agree  
2018: 23% agree  
2020: 15% agree  
2022: 26% agree

A rising disbelief in the Bible's literal truth may help us understand why American evangelicals also increasingly believe that religious faith is a subjective experience rather than an objective reality.

STATEMENT NO. 31

**Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2018: 32% agree  
2020: 23% agree  
2022: 38% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

## Sexual Ethics

The changes in sexual ethics in the United States are occurring at an alarmingly rapid pace. However, one encouraging finding is that evangelicals affirm a biblical view of fornication and adultery in greater numbers.

STATEMENT NO. 25

**Sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 91% agree  
2018: 89% agree  
2020: 90% agree  
2022: 94% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

While evangelicals are more likely than U.S. adults in general to affirm a biblical sexual ethic, in the areas of gender identity and homosexuality, a significant rise

of an unbiblical worldview is apparent, especially in the 2022 survey.

STATEMENT NO. 27

**Gender identity is a matter of choice.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 32% agree

2018: 30% agree

2020: 22% agree

2022: 37% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

The rise of unbiblical views among American evangelicals on the subjects of gender and sexuality may indicate the influence of a secular worldview that is making greater inroads into the church.

STATEMENT NO. 28

**The Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn't apply today.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 19% agree

2018: 20% agree

2020: 11% agree

2022: 28% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

## Abortion

The Bible teaches the personhood of those in the womb ([Ps. 139:13, 16](#); [Luke 1:41, 44](#)). As such, the practice of abortion is the murder of a human being who is an image bearer of God. Past survey results among evangelicals have remained fairly consistent since 2016, with an uptick in 2022 of more evangelicals asserting that abortion is a sin. While the reasons for this positive trend are unknown, it is encouraging to see more evangelicals affirming the personhood of human beings in the womb.

STATEMENT NO. 26

**Abortion is a sin.**

**U.S. Evangelical Finding:**

2016: 87% agree

2018: 88% agree

2020: 88% agree

2022: 91% agree

[View in Data Explorer](#)

Evangelicals were defined by LifeWay Research as people who strongly agreed with the following four statements:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.

- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

Respondents can also be identified as evangelical in the State of Theology [data explorer](#) based on their supplied church affiliation.

## Conclusion

The 2022 State of Theology survey reveals that Americans increasingly reject the divine origin and complete accuracy of the Bible. With no enduring plumb line of absolute truth to conform to, U.S. adults are also increasingly holding to unbiblical worldviews related to human sexuality. In the evangelical sphere, doctrines including the deity and exclusivity of Jesus Christ, as well as the inspiration and authority of the Bible, are increasingly being rejected. While positive trends are present, including evangelicals' views on abortion and sex outside of marriage, an inconsistent biblical ethic is also evident, with more evangelicals embracing a secular worldview in the areas of homosexuality and gender identity.

These results convey the ongoing need for the church to be engaged in apologetics, helping unbelievers by providing a well-reasoned defense of the Christian faith, and helping believers by strengthening their clarity and conviction regarding why they believe what they do. Additionally, the people of God must continue to obey the Great Commission by communicating the whole counsel of God in biblical evangelism and discipleship. The need is great, but the power and promises of God can equip the church to bring truth and light to a deceived and dark world.



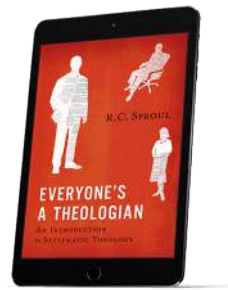
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