

Ligonier Ministries The State of Theology for 2018: US

What do Americans believe about God, salvation, ethics, and the Bible? Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research partnered to find out. These are the fundamental convictions that shape our society.

What do Americans think about God, Jesus Christ, sin, and eternity? Ligonier Ministries' State of Theology survey helps uncover the answers. Every two years, we take the theological temperature of the United States to help Christians better understand today's culture and equip the church with better insights for discipleship. Read some of our key findings from 2018 below and explore the data for yourself.

U.S. Evangelicals

Evangelicals have a great concern for the gospel, the evangel, yet a majority of them also express some views that are contrary to the truth of the Bible. For example, although evangelicals believe that Jesus died on the cross for their salvation (see below), many do not fully understand the gravity of sin.

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

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

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

STATEMENT NO. 11

Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. Finding: 52% of evangelicals agree.

This idea flatly contradicts the Bible, which teaches the radical corruption of every human being and declares that no one does good by nature (Rom. 3:10–12). This is why we need the gospel in the first place—because none of us is good.

Evangelicals are also confused about the exclusivity of Christianity and its objective claims to truth. There has been a slight increase in people who agree with this unorthodox view since 2016, though future surveys will need to confirm this trend.

STATEMENT NO. 3

God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Finding: 51% of evangelicals agree.

The Bible is clear that the gospel is the only way of salvation, and God will not accept the worship of other faiths. It is only through Jesus Christ and by His Spirit that we are able to worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

STATEMENT NO. 13

God counts a person as righteous not because of one's works but only because of one's faith in Jesus Christ. Finding: 91% of evangelicals agree.

Strangely, while most evangelicals strongly believe in justification by faith alone, they are confused about the person of Jesus Christ. On one hand, virtually all evangelicals express support for

Trinitarian doctrine. Yet at the same time, most agree that Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God, which was a view espoused by the ancient heretic Arius.

STATEMENT NO. 2

There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Finding: 97% of evangelicals agree.

STATEMENT NO. 6

Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God. Finding: 78% of evangelicals agree.

These results show the pressing need for Christians to be taught Christology, especially as the outcome has gotten worse since 2016. There is a general lack of teaching today on the person of Christ, a doctrine for which the early church fought so hard. The Ligonier Statement on Christology has been carefully formulated to restate historic, orthodox, biblical Christology.

U.S. Adults

The Holiness of God: When it comes to U.S. adults overall, a clear majority agree with well-known doctrines of the Christian faith. But beneath the surface, they hold these truths loosely. In particular, Americans do not seem to grasp the reality of God's holiness.

An alarming 69% of people disagree that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation, with 58% strongly disagreeing.

STATEMENT NO. 12

Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation. Finding: 23% agree vs. 69% disagree.

If God is not holy, then sin is not a big deal. It is because of our understanding of God's holiness that we understand how significant sin is.

STATEMENT NO. 30

Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth. Finding: 60% agree vs. 30% disagree.

Even 32% of evangelicals say their religious beliefs are not objectively true.

If Christianity and its doctrines, such as the holiness of God and the resurrection of Christ, are merely matters of personal opinion, then we are truly lost. This statistic is a reminder that Christians must contend for the "true truth" of Christianity when engaging with the culture. Jesus believed in absolute truth, and He said that the truth would set people free (John 8:32).

Conclusion

The 2018 State of Theology survey reveals deep confusion about the Bible's teaching, not only among Americans as a whole, but also among evangelicals. There is something very wrong when a majority of Americans can give the correct answers to basic Bible questions and at the same time say that their beliefs are purely a matter of personal opinion.

These results show the urgent need for sound biblical teaching and the bold preaching of the gospel. Millions of people do not understand the holiness of God, the reality of sin, and the one way of salvation in Jesus Christ. There is much work to be done, but it is our hope that these findings will serve the church in its efforts to reach more people with the faithful proclamation of the truth of God's Word.

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