

2022
State of American Theology
Study

RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

The 2022 State of American Theology Study is the fifth in a series of surveys of American adults examining their theological beliefs. Previous surveys were conducted in 2020, 2018, 2016 and 2014. Some comparisons are made in this report to questions repeated across multiple years. Other questions have been asked for the first time.

Ligonier Ministries sponsored the 2022 State of American Theology Study conducted by Lifeway Research to measure the current theological awareness of adult Americans and to expand upon earlier findings. Ligonier Ministries identified specific doctrines and heresies to test. Lifeway Research helped refine these questions and subsequently surveyed 3,011 Americans.

Questions focused on six key doctrinal areas and included a number of specific areas where Americans differ from historic and orthodox views.

Beliefs about God

On all 5 surveys, a consistent 7 in 10 Americans believe in one true God in three persons. About two-thirds believe God cannot make a mistake, but half believe God is less than all-knowing having to learn as he goes. Two thirds of Americans believe God accepts worship from all religions. Two-thirds consider the resurrection of Jesus an actual occurrence, but a majority of Americans deny the deity of Christ and that Jesus has always existed. Almost 6 in 10 categorize the Holy Spirit as being a force rather than a personal being.

- 71% agree “There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”
- 67% agree “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam.”
- 66% of Americans agree “God is a perfect being and cannot make a mistake.”
- 51% agree “God learns and adapts to different circumstances.”
- 66% agree “Biblical accounts of the physical (bodily) resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. This event actually occurred.”
- 55% agree “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”
- 53% agree “Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.”
- 59% agree “The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being.”
- 51% agree “The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth or new life before a person has faith in Jesus Christ.”
- 22% agree “The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible.”

Beliefs about Goodness and Sin

Another consistency across all five surveys is that two-thirds of Americans find most people good by nature. More than 7 in 10 believe everyone is born innocent. Despite this flattering view of mankind, more than half of Americans believe God measures righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ rather than one's works. A quarter of Americans believe any sin deserves eternal punishment.

- 71% of Americans agree “Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.”
- 66% agree “Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.”
- 57% agree “God counts a person as righteous not because of one's works but only because of one's faith in Jesus Christ.”
- 25% agree “Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation.”

Beliefs about Salvation and Religious Texts

Half of Americans believe the Bible is completely accurate, but almost the same number say the Bible is not literally true. That doubt in the Bible has slowly grown since 2014. One reason may be that 2 in 5 Americans say science disproves the Bible. 6 in 10 Americans believe that eternal salvation requires trust in Jesus Christ alone, and 3 in 10 say God chose those who would be saved before creation.

- 51% of Americans agree “The Bible is 100% accurate in all that it teaches.”
- 53% agree “The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true.” This is higher than 2020 (48%), 2018 (47%), 2016 (44%), and 2014 (41%).
- 40% agree “Modern science disproves the Bible.” This is higher than 2020 (34%) and 2018 (36%).
- 60% agree “Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.”
- 30% agree “God chose the people he would save before he created the world.”

Beliefs about Judgement and Punishment

More than 6 in 10 Americans expect Jesus to return and judge all people. Fewer, but still a majority believe some people will be punished in a place called hell.

- 59% of Americans agree “Hell is a real place where certain people will be punished forever.” This is higher than 2020 (56%) and 2018 (54%).
- 64% agree “There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.”

Beliefs about the Church

Two-thirds of Americans now there are valid alternatives to corporate worship. Only a little over 1 in 3 think Christians must join a local church. Three in 10 believe Christians should be quiet about political issues.

- 66% of Americans agree “Worshiping alone or with one’s family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.” This is higher than 2020 (58%), 2018 (58%), 2016 (59%), and 2014 (52%).
- 30% agree “Christians should be silent on issues of politics.” This is higher than 2020 (24%) and 2018 (25%).
- 36% agree “Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church.”

Beliefs about Authority

Six in 10 Americans say religious belief is about opinion rather than objective truth. Adults remain divided down the middle on whether abortion or sex outside of marriage is a sin. A similar half of Americans believe the Bible has authority over our choices. A small but growing minority think God is unconcerned with their daily decisions.

- 60% of Americans agree “Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth.”
- 53% agree “Sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin.”
- 53% agree “Abortion is a sin.”
- 52% agree “The Bible has the authority to tell us what we must do.”
- 46% agree “The Bible’s condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn’t apply today.”
- 42% agree “Gender identity is a matter of choice.” This is higher than 2020 (38%), 2018 (38%), and 2016 (38%).
- 32% agree that “God is unconcerned with my day-to-day decisions.” This is higher than 2020 (25%), 2018 (26%), 2016 (28%), and 2014 (20%).

Methodology

The 2022 State of American Theology Study was conducted by Lifeway Research. The objective of the study is to quantify among a national sample of Americans indicators of theological understanding today. The project was designed with a large sample to allow for comparisons between groups within Christian churches and those outside the Christian faith.

The project was sponsored by Ligonier Ministries to ascertain the state of theological awareness and belief among Americans, including several subsets of Americans (particularly Evangelicals).

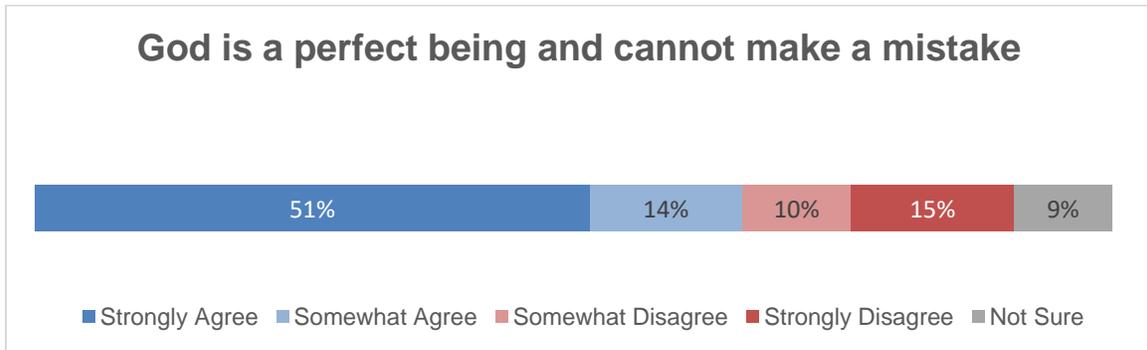
The quantitative survey of American adults was conducted using a large, national online panel. Quotas were in place to ensure the sample was demographically balanced and slight weights were used to ensure the sample matches the population on gender, age, ethnicity, income, region and religion. 3,011 surveys were completed January 5-23, 2022. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed $\pm 1.9\%$. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Ligonier Ministries identified specific doctrines and heresies to test. Lifeway Research helped refine these questions to ensure the following principles were followed throughout the questionnaire:

- Each doctrine or heresy was tested by stating it as fact and asking the respondent to indicate their level of agreement,
- Phrasing that can introduce bias was excluded,
- Questions in which the desired response is agreement and questions in which the desired response is disagreement were mixed throughout the survey, and
- Wording choices sought to use words that would be understood by the typical American.

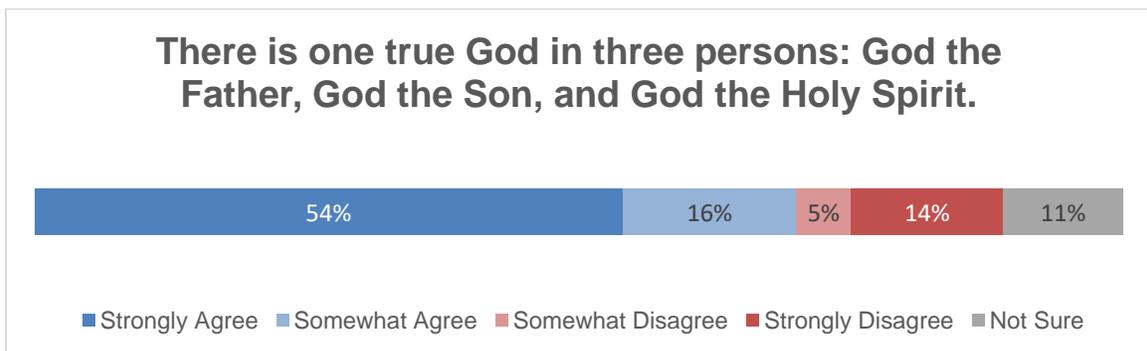
Quantitative Findings

BELIEFS ABOUT GOD



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (98% v. 57%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (90% v. 48%). Americans age 65+ are the most likely to Agree (74%). Americans age 18-34 are the least likely to Agree (59%).

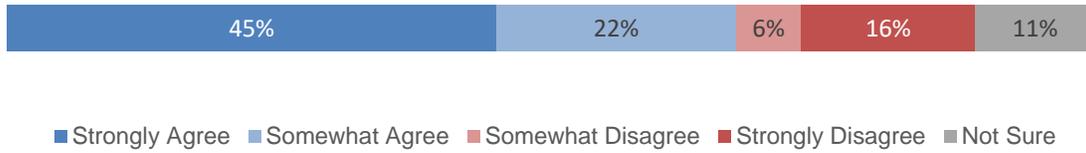
The 66% who Agree is similar to 2020 (65%) and 2016 (65%) but lower than 2018 (69%) and higher than 2014 (63%).



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (97% v. 64%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (93% v. 54%). Americans age 65+ are the most likely to Agree (81%).

The 71% who Agree is consistent with 2020 (72%), 2018 (70%), 2016 (69%), and 2014 (71%).

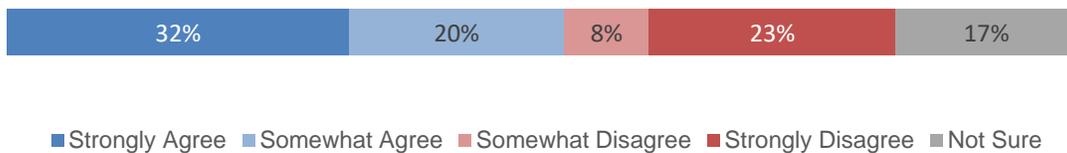
God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (38% v. 18%).

The 67% who Agree is similar to 2018 (66%) but significantly higher than 2020 (64%) and 2016 (64%).

God learns and adapts to different circumstances



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (43% v. 29%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (59% v. 46%). Americans age 18-34 (57%) and 35-49 (54%) are more likely to Agree than those 50-64 (48%) and 65+ (46%).

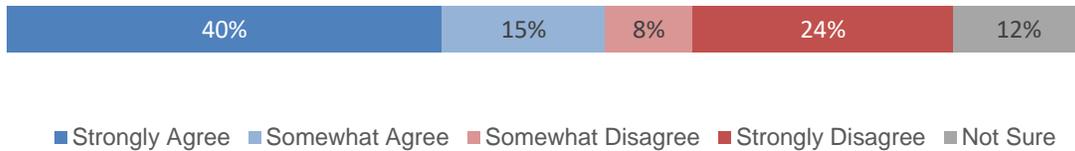
Biblical accounts of the physical (bodily) resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. This event actually occurred.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (98% v. 58%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (90% v. 48%). Americans age 18-34 are the least likely to Agree (58%).

The 66% who Agree is similar to 2020 (66%), 2018 (66%), 2016 (64%) and 2014 (68%).

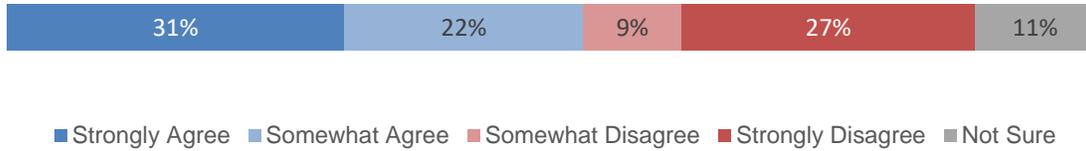
Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (73% v. 50%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (69% v. 44%).

The 55% who Agree is similar to 2020 (55%) and 2018 (57%) and higher than in 2016 (52%).

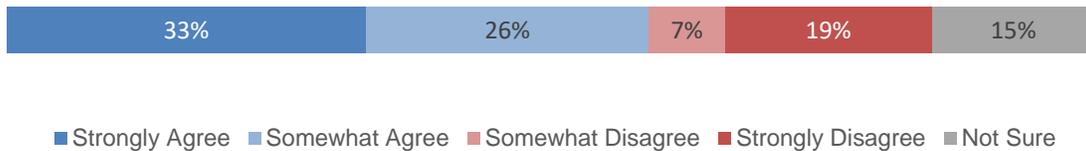
Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (54% v. 31%). This is a lower percentage of those with Evangelical Beliefs disagreeing than in 2020 (66%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (47% v. 27%). Americans age 35-49 are the most likely to Agree (64%).

The 53% who Agree is similar to 2020 (52%).

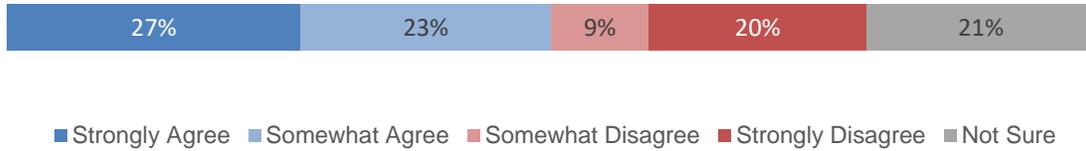
The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being.



A lower percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs *Disagree* than in 2020 (33% v. 43%).

The 59% who Agree is unchanged from 2020 (59%) and 2018 (59%) and is significantly higher than in 2016 (56%), but less than 2014 (64%).

The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth or new life before a person has faith in Jesus Christ.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (63% v. 47%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (66% v. 39%). Americans age 18-34 (53%) and 35-49 (58%) are more likely to Agree than those 50-64 (47%) and 65+ (44%).

The 51% who Agree is unchanged from 2020 (51%), 2018 (51%), and 2016 (50%) but significantly higher than 2014 (46%).

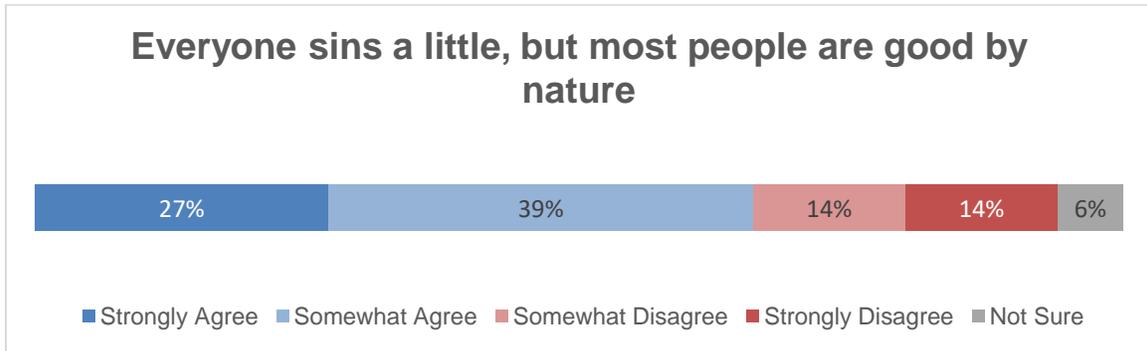
The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible.



Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (32% v. 14%). Americans age 18-34 (30%) and 35-49 (30%) are more likely to Agree than those 50-64 (14%) and 65+ (10%).

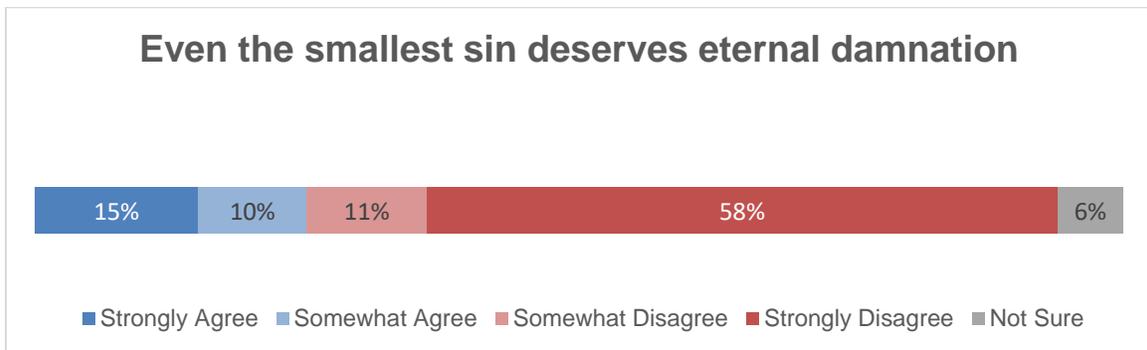
The 22% who Agree is similar to 2018 (20%) but significantly higher than 2020 (19%).

BELIEFS ABOUT GOODNESS AND SIN



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (39% v. 25%). This is a lower percentage of those with Evangelical Beliefs disagreeing than in 2020 (49%). Americans age 65+ (72%) are more likely to Agree than those 18-34 (66%) and 50-64 (61%).

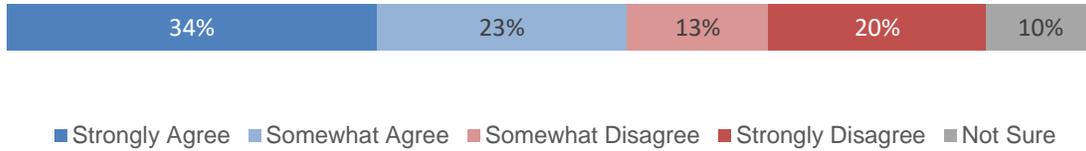
The 66% who Agree is consistent with 2020 (65%), 2018 (66%), 2016 (65%), and 2014 (67%).



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (55% v. 17%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (42% v. 13%). Americans age 35-49 are the most likely to Agree (33%).

The 25% who Agree is similar to 2020 (26%) and 2018 (23%) but significantly higher than 2016 (19%) and 2014 (18%).

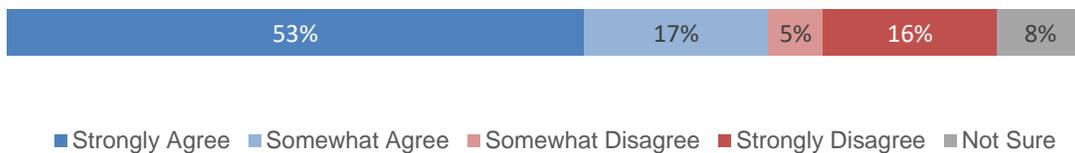
God counts a person as righteous not because of one's works but only because of one's faith in Jesus Christ.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (93% v. 48%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (77% v. 42%).

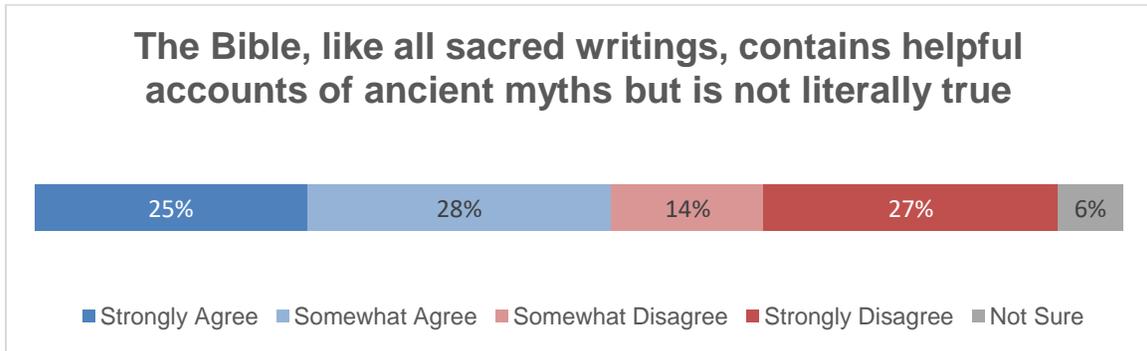
The 57% who Agree is similar to 2020 (56%) and significantly higher than 2018 (53%).

Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.



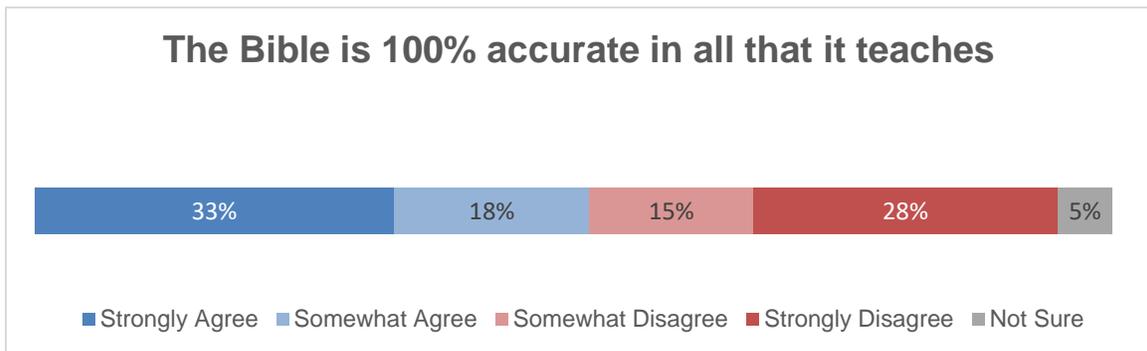
Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (32% v. 18%).

BELIEFS ABOUT SALVATION AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (71% v. 33%). This is a lower percentage of those with Evangelical Beliefs disagreeing than in 2020 (81%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (56% v. 30%). Americans age 18-34 (58%) and 35-49 (59%) are more likely to *Agree* than those 50-64 (46%) and 65+ (46%).

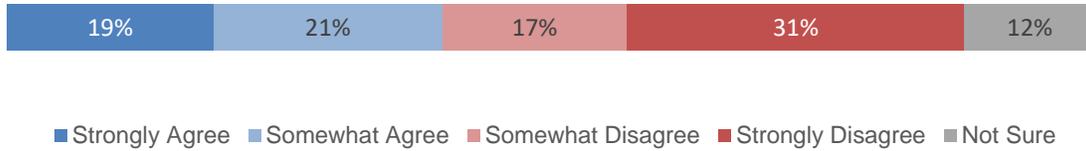
The 53% who *Agree* is significantly higher than the 2020 (48%), 2018 (47%), 2016 (44%), and 2014 (41%) surveys.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Agree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (95% v. 40%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Agree* than those who do not (78% v. 32%).

The 51% who *Agree* is similar to 2018 (50%) but significantly higher than 2020 (48%), 2016 (47%), and 2014 (43%).

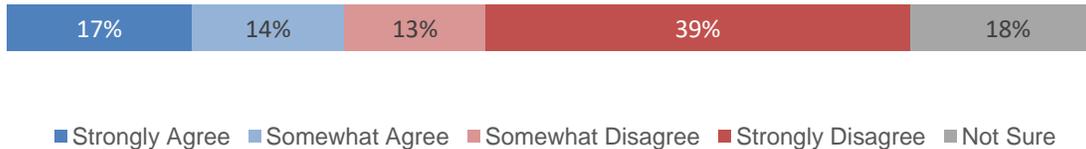
Modern science disproves the Bible.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (63% v. 44%). However, the percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who Agree is higher than in 2020 (30% v. 17%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (60% v. 39%). Americans age 18-34 (51%) and 35-49 (52%) are more likely to Agree than those 50-64 (29%) and 65+ (21%).

The 40% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (34%) and 2018 (36%).

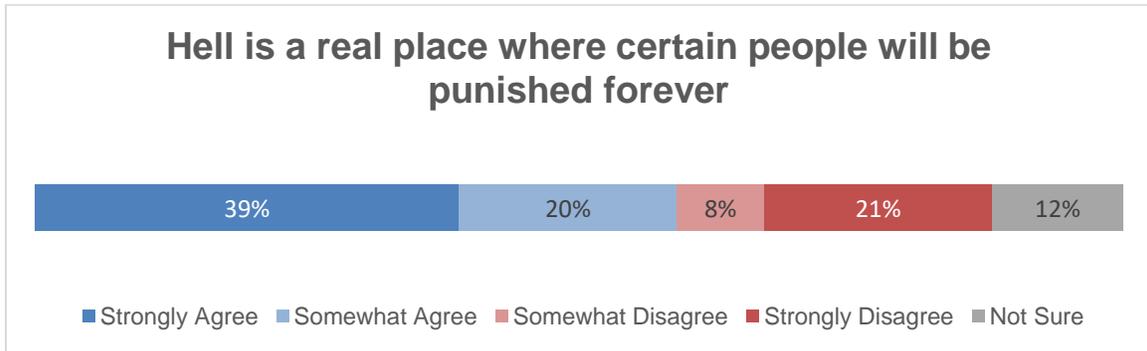
God chose the people he would save before he created the world.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (51% v. 25%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (46% v. 19%). Americans age 65+ are the most likely to *Disagree* (61%).

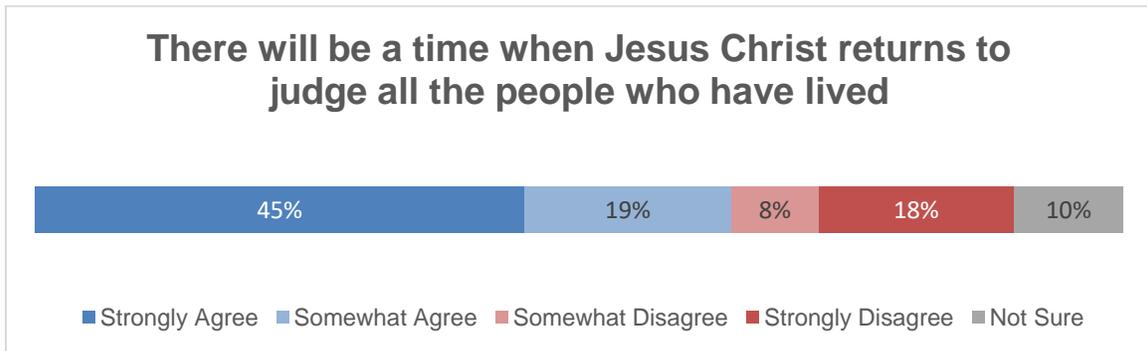
The 30% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (26%).

BELIEFS ABOUT JUDGEMENT AND PUNISHMENT



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (94% v. 49%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (83% v. 41%).

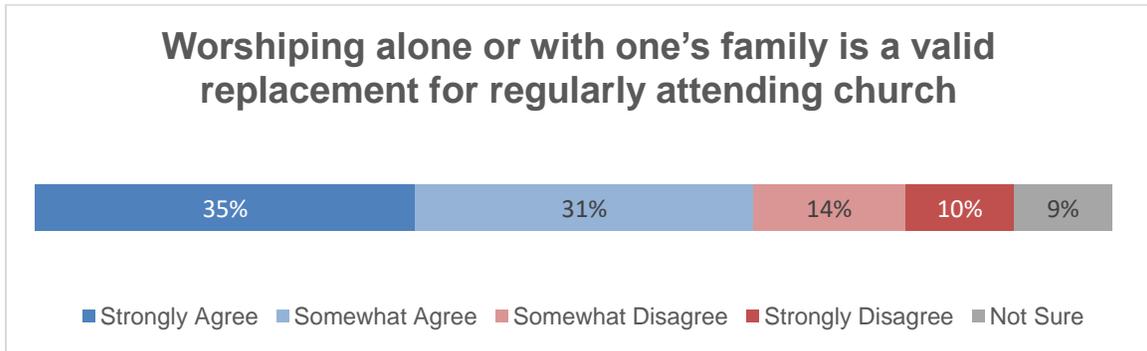
The 59% who Agree is higher than 2020 (56%) and 2018 (54%).



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (98% v. 55%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (89% v. 45%). Americans age 18-34 are the least likely to Agree (58%).

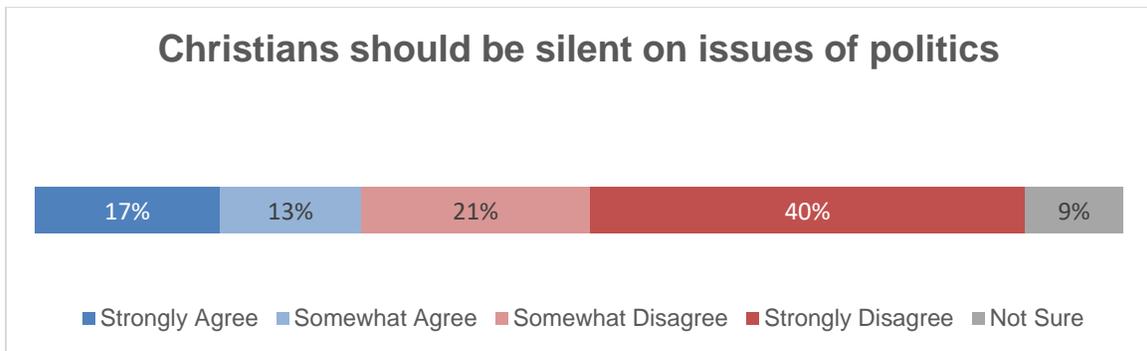
The 64% who Agree is similar to 2020 (62%), 2018 (62%), and 2014 (63%) but higher than 2016 (59%).

BELIEFS ABOUT THE CHURCH



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (41% v. 20%). However, the percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who Agree is higher than in 2020 (54% v. 39%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (37% v. 15%).

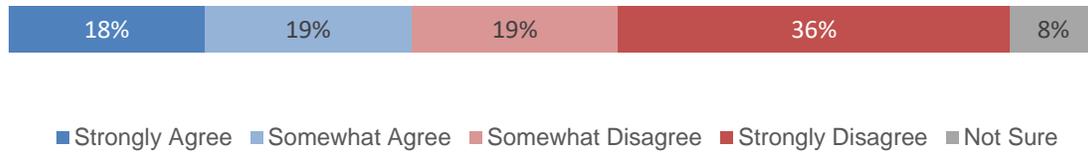
The 66% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (58%), 2018 (58%), 2016 (59%), and 2014 (52%).



The percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who *Disagree* is lower than in 2020 (64% v. 78%). Americans age 65+ are the least likely to Agree (17%).

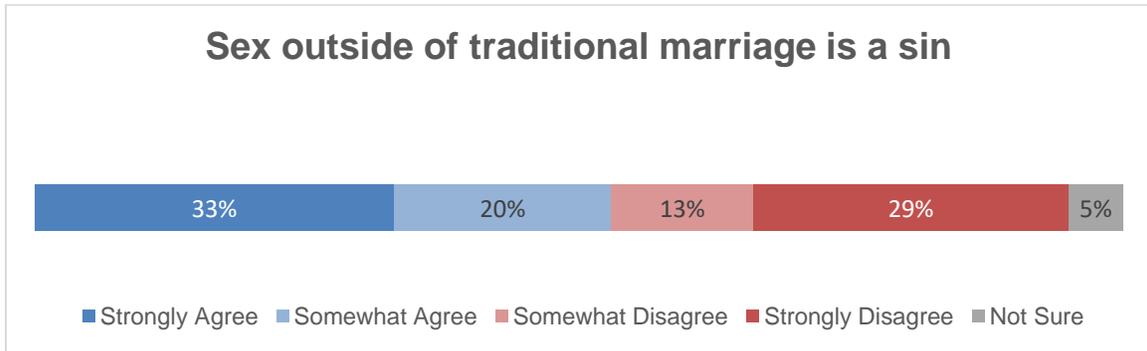
The 30% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (24%) and 2018 (25%).

Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church.



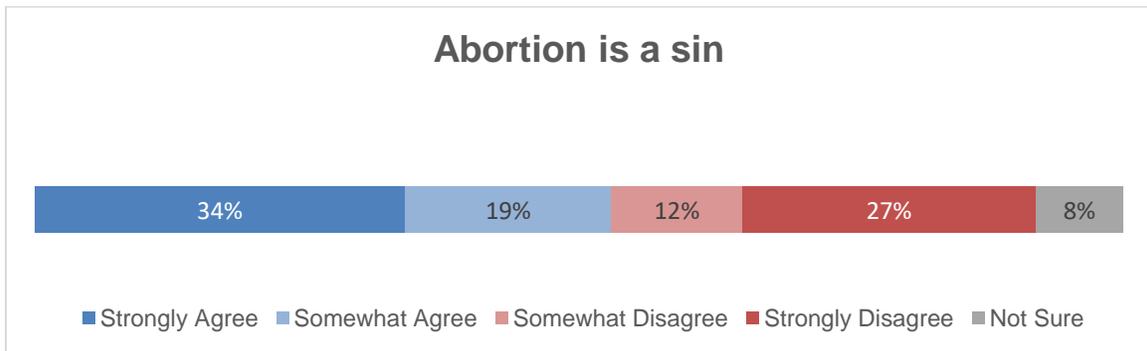
Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (68% v. 28%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (62% v. 18%). Americans age 35-49 are the most likely to Agree (44%). Americans age 65+ are the least likely to Agree (27%).

BELIEFS ABOUT AUTHORITY



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (94% v. 42%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (76% v. 36%). Americans age 18-34 are the least likely to Agree (47%).

The 53% who Agree is similar to 2020 (51%) and 2018 (51%) and higher than 2016 (49%).



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (91% v. 43%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (76% v. 36%). Americans age 18-34 are the least likely to Agree (48%).

The 53% who Agree is similar to 2020 (51%) and 2018 (52%) and higher than 2016 (49%).

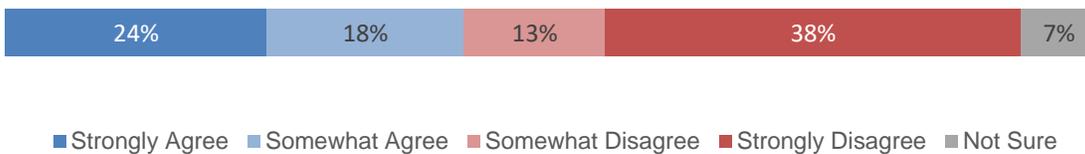
God created male and female



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (99% v. 72%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (96% v. 64%). Americans age 65+ are the most likely to Agree (87%).

The 78% who Agree is similar to 2020 (79%), 2018 (77%) and 2016 (77%).

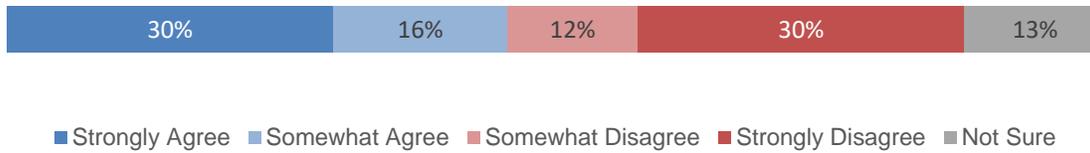
Gender identity is a matter of choice.



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (59% v. 49%). Americans age 65+ are the least likely to Agree (29%).

The 42% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (38%), 2018 (38%), and 2016 (38%).

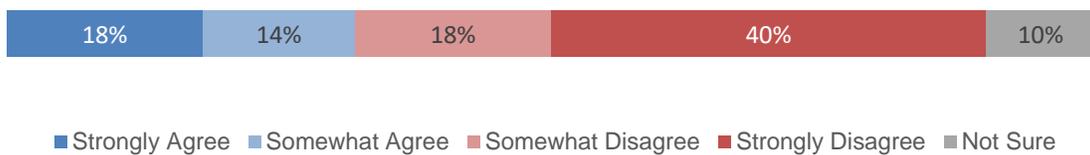
The Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior doesn't apply today



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (67% v. 35%). The percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who *Disagree* is lower than in 2020 (81%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (55% v. 32%). Americans age 18-34 (56%) and 35-49 (54%) are more likely to *Agree* than those 50-64 (37%) and 65+ (32%).

The 46% who *Agree* is similar to 2018 (44%) and is higher than 2020 (40%) and 2016 (42%).

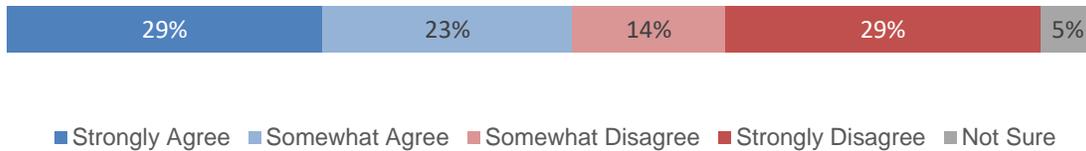
God is unconcerned with my day-to-day decisions



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (76% v. 53%). The percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who *Disagree* is lower than in 2020 (87%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (69% v. 49%). Americans age 18-34 (41%) and 35-49 (41%) are more likely to *Agree* than those 50-64 (26%) and 65+ (17%).

The 32% who *Agree* is higher than 2020 (25%), 2018 (26%), 2016 (28%), and 2014 (20%).

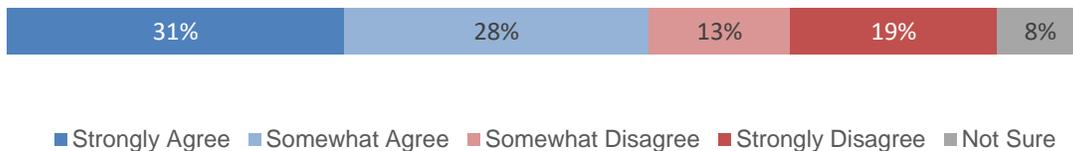
The Bible has the authority to tell us what we must do



Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to Agree than those without Evangelical Beliefs (94% v. 41%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (79% v. 32%).

The 52% who Agree is similar to 2020 (51%), 2018 (53%), 2016 (50%), but is significantly higher than 2014 (49%).

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

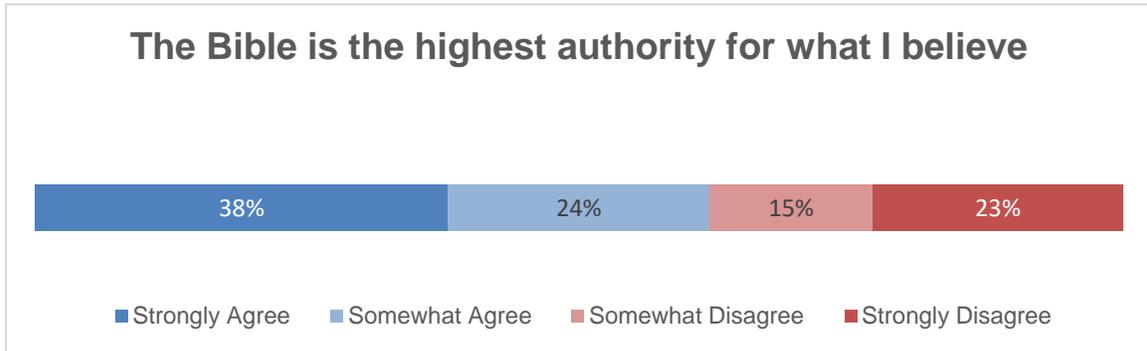


Americans with Evangelical Beliefs are more likely to *Disagree* than those without Evangelical Beliefs (56% v. 26%). The percentage of Americans with Evangelical Beliefs who *Disagree* is lower than in 2020 (68%). Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to *Disagree* than those who do not (45% v. 22%). Americans age 18-34 (67%) and 35-49 (66%) are more likely to Agree than those 50-64 (53%) and 65+ (51%).

The 60% who Agree is significantly higher than 2020 (54%) and the same as 2018 (60%).

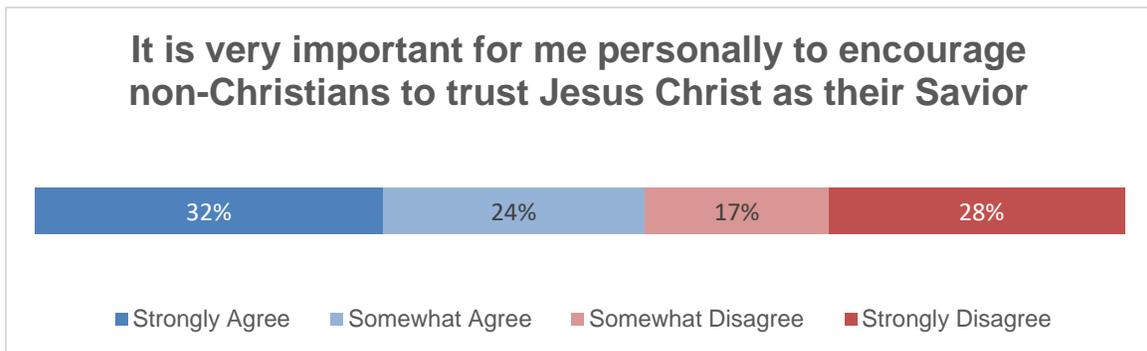
NAE LIFEWAY RESEARCH EVANGELICAL BELIEFS DEFINITION

Using this definition, those who agree strongly with all four of these questions are considered to have Evangelical Beliefs:



Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (87% v. 43%). Americans age 18-34 (%) are the least likely to Agree (56%).

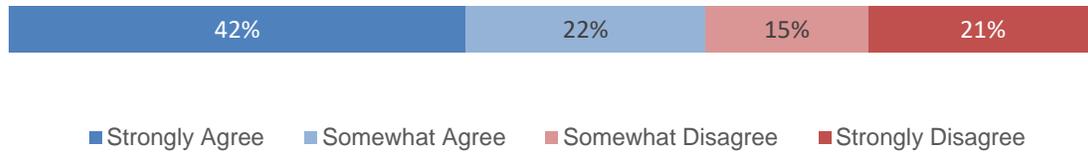
The 62% who Agree is consistent with 2020 (62%), 2018 (62%), and 2016 (61%).



Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (83% v. 35%).

The 55% who Agree is similar to 2020 (54%) and significantly higher than 2018 (52%) and 2016 (51%).

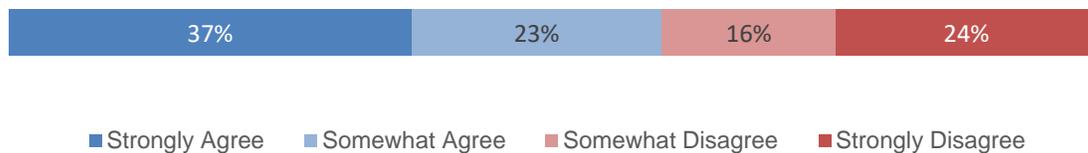
Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin



Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (87% v. 47%).

The 64% who Agree is consistent with 2020 (65%) and 2018 (62%) but significantly higher than 2016 (60%).

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



Americans who attend a religious service at least once or twice a month are more likely to Agree than those who do not (84% v. 43%).

The 60% who Agree is the same as 2020 (60%) and significantly higher than 2018 (57%) and 2016 (54%).