

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2022

Release #7: Non-Denominational Pastors Far More Likely to Hold Biblical Views than All Other Denominations' Pastors

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Earlier this year, research from the *American Worldview Inventory 2022*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, revealed that [just 37% of Christian pastors](#) have a biblical worldview.

This latest report analyzes that research across major U.S. denominations, showing that the loss of biblical belief is prevalent among pastors in all denominational groupings.

The churches whose pastors were by far the most likely to embrace basic biblical principles were those serving non-denominational and independent Protestant churches. Surprisingly low numbers of biblical beliefs were held by Evangelical pastors, according to the report.

The report also found unexpectedly large percentages of pastors, regardless of their title or position or their denominational affiliation, rejecting biblical teaching on a wide range of issues. The least biblically centered pastors, by a substantial margin, are those who serve as executive pastors, teaching pastors, and children's or youth pastors.

This latest report from the *AWVI 2022* looks at 17 basic beliefs, including salvation through Jesus Christ, moral and biblical truth, human purpose, the value of human life, and other foundational biblical issues, among pastors in the nation's seven major denominational groupings.

Based on that analysis, the report shows that of the seven denominational groupings evaluated in the nationwide survey of pastors, just one of the seven groups features at least three out of every four pastors (75%) holding biblical views on a majority of the basic beliefs evaluated.

Among non-denominational and independent Protestant churches, three-quarters or more of those pastors held 12 biblical views, while between half to three-quarters of the pastors from those churches embraced a biblical perspective on the other five beliefs in question.

Among the other six denominational families studied—which cumulatively represent more than 90% of all Christian churches in America—none of those groups had at least three-quarters of their pastors holding biblical views on even half of the beliefs tested.

One of the most surprising outcomes in the research is how few pastors of evangelical churches hold biblical beliefs. In examining how often at least 75% of the evangelical pastors held biblical views related to the 17 beliefs studied, there were only four instances.

As low as that was, it was twice as many as found among pastors from mainline, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches. Lowest on the list were the pastors from Holiness churches and from traditionally

black denominations. There were no instances where at least three out of four pastors from those groups possess biblical views on the basic scriptural principles evaluated.

The survey discovered that a majority of the pastors from two of the denominational families—Catholic and traditionally black churches—lack biblical beliefs in relation to most of the 17 biblical perspectives evaluated.

Percentage of Pastors, by Denominational Family, Who Hold Biblical Beliefs			
Denominational Family	75% or more have biblical views on these matters	50-74% have biblical views on these matters	Less than 50% have biblical views on these matters
Non-denominational Christian/ Christian Independent	12 beliefs	5 beliefs	0 beliefs
Evangelical	4 beliefs	13 beliefs	0 beliefs
Mainline Protestant	2 beliefs	15 beliefs	0 beliefs
Pentecostal/Charismatic	2 beliefs	12 beliefs	3 beliefs
Catholic	2 beliefs	5 beliefs	10 beliefs
Holiness	0 beliefs	11 beliefs	6 beliefs
Traditionally Black	0 beliefs	6 beliefs	11 beliefs
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=1,000 Christian pastors, 2022.			

Overall, the survey examined more than three dozen beliefs held by pastors. The current report focuses on roughly half of those beliefs, revealing that a shockingly large percentage reject biblical teaching on some of the most basic Christian beliefs.

For instance, among evangelical pastors, about four out of every 10 (43%) do not believe that the personal accumulation of wealth is provided by God in order for the individual to manage those resources for God’s purposes.

A similar proportion (39%) contends that there is no absolute moral truth and that each individual must determine their own truth. Likewise, only 38% maintains that human life is sacred and 37% say that having faith matters more than which faith you have.

Amazingly, given the foundations of evangelicalism, three out of every 10 evangelical pastors (30%) do not believe that their salvation is based on having confessed their sins and accepting Jesus Christ as their savior.

The proportion of Pentecostal and charismatic pastors who embrace non-scriptural points of view is also astounding. A majority of those pastors (54%) believe that moral truth is relative to the individual and situation, that there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time.

In addition, about half of all Pentecostal and charismatic pastors believe that good people can earn their eternal salvation (47%), reject the notion that success in life is consistent obedience to God (45%), and believe that earthly wealth is provided by God to people to manage for His purposes (46%). Nearly half (45%) do not believe that human life is sacred while almost half embrace the idea that having faith matters more than which faith it is.

Pastors of churches aligned with traditionally black denominations consistently reject conventional biblical perspectives. For instance, among the beliefs rejected by a majority of pastors associated

with traditionally black denominations are the teachings that success is consistent obedience to God, human life is sacred, and wealth is entrusted by God to people to manage for kingdom purposes.

Among the perspectives championed by a majority of pastors serving at churches in traditionally black denominations are that there is no absolute moral truth (76%), reincarnation is a real possibility, having some type of religious faith matters more than the substance of that faith, good people can earn eternal salvation, and the Bible is ambiguous in its teachings about abortion.

The study also found that slightly less than half of the pastors connected to traditionally black denominations are born-again, based on their theological beliefs.

Basic Beliefs of Pastors, by Denominational Families							
Belief held by pastor	Denominational Family of the Pastor						
	Non-D	Evang	ML	Cath	Pent	Blk	Holi
Human life is sacred	90%	62%	68%	34%	55%	40%	35%
The personal accumulation of money and other forms of wealth are entrusted to a person by God to manage for His purposes	71	57	62	33	46	30	38
When you die you will go to Heaven only because you have confessed your sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior	71	70	51	44	64	47	49
Success in life is consistent obedience to God	67	60	53	35	45	40	37
Reincarnation is a real possibility	33	33	32	47	43	70	52
Having faith matters more than which faith you have	21	37	39	84	45	68	55
A person who is generally good, or does enough good things for others, will earn a place in Heaven	21	34	30	77	47	66	55
Determining moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time	15	39	37	79	54	76	62
The Bible is ambiguous regarding abortion; it is possible to make a compelling biblical argument either for or against abortion	15	26	49	61	35	51	40
<u>Key to denominational abbreviations:</u> Non-D: non-denominational and independent. Evang: evangelical. ML: mainline Protestant. Cath: Roman Catholic. Pent: Pentecostal and charismatic. Blk: traditionally black. Holi: Holiness.							
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=1,000 Christian pastors, 2022.							

Pastoral Position and Beliefs

Looking at the survey data according to the pastoral position of respondents, unexpectedly large percentages of pastors (regardless of their title or position) reject biblical teaching on a wide range of

issues. The least biblically centered pastors, by a substantial margin, are those who serve as executive pastors, teaching pastors, and children's or youth pastors.

Less than one-half of the nation's executive pastors hold biblical views on 15 of the 17 perspectives evaluated. Most teaching pastors rejected the biblical position for a majority of the beliefs tested (9 of 17 beliefs).

Among children's and youth pastors, a majority rejected biblical positions for about one-third of the beliefs examined (6 of the 17 beliefs). While a majority of associate pastors rejected biblical teaching related to four of the 17 beliefs tested, there were no instances in which a majority of senior pastors rejected biblical positions related to those 17 beliefs.

However, unexpectedly substantial proportions of senior pastors do not believe what the Bible teaches related to some fundamental perspectives. For instance, large minorities of senior pastors are in conflict with the Bible on a range of teachings:

One-third or more of senior pastors believe:

- Sexual relations between two unmarried people who believe they love each other is morally acceptable.
- Determining moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time.
- The Holy Spirit is not a living entity but is a symbol of God's power, presence, or purity.
- Having faith matters more than which faith you have.
- Reincarnation is a real possibility.
- It is possible to reach complete spiritual maturity during our time on earth.
- A person who is generally good, or does enough good things for others, can earn a place in Heaven.
- They are willing to try just about anything once.
- Socialism is preferable to capitalism.
- Allowing property ownership facilitates economic injustice.
- The Bible is ambiguous in its teaching about abortion, enabling you to make a strong argument either for or against abortion based on biblical principles.

One-third or more of senior pastors do not believe:

- Human life is sacred.
- Wealth is entrusted to individuals to be managed for God's purposes.
- Success is consistent obedience to God.
- People are born into sin and can only be saved from its consequences by Jesus Christ.
- They, personally, will experience eternal salvation only because they have personally confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.

How Did We Get Here?

The results, according to the George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center, might be related to something he observed in the data.

Percentage of Pastors, by Pastoral Role, Who Hold Biblical Beliefs			
Pastoral Role	75% or more have biblical views on these matters	50-74% have biblical views on these matters	Less than 50% have biblical views on these matters
Senior/Lead Pastor	2 beliefs	15 beliefs	0 beliefs
Associate/Assistant Pastor	0 beliefs	13 beliefs	4 beliefs
Teaching Pastor	0 beliefs	8 beliefs	9 beliefs
Executive/Administrative Pastor	0 beliefs	2 beliefs	15 beliefs
Children's/Youth Pastor	1 belief	10 beliefs	6 beliefs
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=1,000 Christian pastors, 2022.			

“While studying the spiritual behavioral patterns of pastors it became evident that a large share of them does not have a regular spiritual routine,” Barna observed. “There was a correlation between possessing biblical beliefs and a consistent regimen of Bible reading, prayer, worship, and confession.”

Barna continued, “In some of the denominational groupings, a majority of pastors do not engage in those foundational spiritual practices on a regular basis. Yet, among the pastors who have the most consistently biblical beliefs, there is also a daily routine that incorporates all of those disciplines.”

Although the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* did not explore why many pastors do not engage in such basic spiritual routines, Barna offered a possible explanation. “Other research among pastors I have undertaken suggests that pastor’s jobs are overwhelming. The typical pastor is expected by church members to handle an enormous number and range of tasks. In such situations it must be easy to neglect the fundamentals in order to address tasks that seem more pressing and urgent. Unfortunately, after a prolonged period of such neglect, the foundations become weak and the person changes—in this case, not for the better.”

Barna offered specific examples from his research:

“For instance, one-third of all pastors do not read the Bible during a typical week,” he explained. “That might be compared to a doctor not washing his hands before the operations he performs during a week; it’s unthinkable, almost unimaginable. This particular mistake is most prolific among pastors in the Holiness and traditionally black denominations. About half of them do not read the Bible during the course of a typical week.”

Barna continued, “Given that Bible reading is a major source of spiritual nourishment, no wonder so many pastors are spiritually weak and ineffective. Add to that their frequent failure to pray, to connect with God through worship and thanksgiving, to spend time seeking God’s direction and will, or regularly returning to Him to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness—it’s no wonder so many pastors struggle.”

“And considering some errant spiritual activities, such as one out of four pastors repeating a ‘personal mantra’ during the week, and you wind up with an industry of religious professionals who are well-intentioned and hard-working, but spiritually way off track,” Barna said.

Barna pointed out another important revelation from the research.

“We know that just 37% of pastors have a biblical worldview, and that the dominant worldview among pastors is syncretism,” he noted. “As our survey demonstrates, large numbers of pastors have

abandoned even the most basic and hallowed biblical teachings for ideas that now permeate our culture.”

Barna continued, “Because pastors teach what they believe, many churches are becoming centers of syncretism and secular thought. Perhaps without even realizing it, thousands of pastors have become leaders of a movement away from God, toward narcissism.”

“With so many churches and their pastors in the culture’s grip, rather than fervently committed to serving God and teaching His word,” Barna stated, “you can clearly see why most church-going Christians are being more influenced by the culture than the culture is being influenced by America’s Christians.”

“To see American culture transformed,” he concluded, “will require a time of Christians and pastors devoted to repentance and the scriptures unlike anything we have seen in more than a century. And until that happens, there is little hope of America becoming a godly, Bible-friendly nation once again.”

About the Research

The data referred to in this report are taken from the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on 54 worldview-related questions that measure both beliefs and behavior within eight categories of worldview application.

This wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was conducted in February and March of 2022 among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Christian pastors. The survey sample utilized denominational and geographic quotas to replicate the incidence of churches related to those attributes. To optimize the representative nature of the sample, each pastor who was invited to participate in the survey was contacted a minimum of six times before being replaced in the sample universe. The survey interviews were conducted by both telephone and online modes and lasted an average of 17 minutes each. The survey data for the entire sample have an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 3.2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling elements in the research process. The data were minimally weighted to better approximate a key characteristics (e.g., pastoral position) to reflect known church distributions.

The study among pastors refers to several segments of churches, or denominational families. Examples of the denominations represented in those families include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Mainline Protestant: American Baptist, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church.
- Evangelical: Baptist Bible Fellowship, Free Will Baptist, Southern Baptist Convention, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church in America.
- Traditionally Black: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), AME Zion, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention USA, National Primitive Baptist, Church of God in Christ.
- Charismatic/Pentecostal: Assembly of God, Church of God – Cleveland, Foursquare, International Pentecostal Holiness, United Pentecostal.
- Holiness: Christian & Missionary Alliance, Church of God – Anderson, Church of the Nazarene, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist.

A separate wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was undertaken in January 2022 among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13. Reports related to that survey have been released and are accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory*, other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation, and worldview-related surveys among the ACU student population. The groundbreaking ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation, enabling the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center is accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.