



2025 American Worldview Inventory – Report #9

Research Identifies Common Sources of Confusion about Sin

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(GLENDALE, AZ) Americans are deeply confused about the nature of sin—with only one in seven (14%) holding a consistently biblical view of sin. And much of this confusion stems from how the nation’s adults define “sin,” what they believe it does, and what sources they trust to explain it, according to research from the [Cultural Research Center](#) at [Arizona Christian University](#).

In fact, a new report identifies six key public perceptions about sin— ranging from denying the heart’s corruption to downplaying sin as insignificant— that help explain Americans’ widespread confusion about sin’s source, seriousness, consequences, and connection to God.

The latest findings build on an [earlier CRC report](#) from Dr. George Barna showing that although four out of five adults believe sin exists, only half think all people sin and about the same number are willing to call themselves “a sinner.”

And by believing people are “basically good at heart,” the overwhelming majority of Americans (75%) blur the seriousness of sin. In fact, the perspectives that most Americans have on sin are riddled with both logical and theological inconsistencies, according to findings from the *American Worldview Inventory 2025*.

The American View of Sin

Dr. George Barna, who directed the research for the Cultural Research Center, summarized the findings of the deeper dive into six key public perceptions about sin.

- ***Fewer than half of all adults—just 43%—believe that sinful behavior stems from a wicked, corrupt heart.*** This infrequent acceptance of the biblical teaching that the human heart is wicked and corrupt is consistent with the prevailing notion that people are “basically good at heart.”
 - The groups especially likely to believe that are blacks (58%), theologically-identified born-again Christians (59%), and those who attend either an Evangelical (67%) or Pentecostal church (71%). The people least likely included Asians (35%), people 65 or older (34%), LGBTQ individuals (33%), and people who say they have no religious faith (16%).

How American Religious Segments Define Sin

Definition of sin	All adults	Self-identified Christian	Theologically identified, born-again Christian	Protestant	Catholic	Evangelical	Pentecostal	Indep./NonDenom	Main-line
Unintentional mistakes	4%	5%	3%	5%	4%	3%	10%	3%	8%
Intentional choice, morally wrong, but does not matter	12	13	13	12	18	9	16	11	13
Intentional choice, morally wrong, matters spiritually	41	49	63	52	43	50	44	56	51
Inappropriate choices, but sin differs for each person	14	14	11	13	14	12	6	14	15
A religious concept that's important to some, irrelevant to others	13	14	9	14	15	24	18	13	9
No such thing as sin	16	5	*	3	6	3	6	2	4

Abbreviations: Indep./NonDenom = Independent or non-denominational Christian church.

* = indicates less than one-half of one percent.

NOTE: The six columns of church-related data refer to the type of church the respondent attends most often.

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2025*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.

How American Generations and Races Define Sin									
Sin definition	All adults	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian
Unintentional mistakes	4%	4%	6%	4%	2%	4%	5%	4%	3%
Intentional choice, morally wrong, doesn't matter	12	9	11	13	16	12	10	15	11
Intentional choice, morally wrong, matters spiritually	41	33	38	42	46	42	39	40	28
Inappropriate choices, but sin differs for each person	14	21	12	14	12	12	17	16	14
Religious concept; important to some, irrelevant to others	13	12	17	13	7	12	15	14	17
No such thing as sin	16	21	17	14	17	17	15	10	28
Abbreviations: Gen Z = adult portion born 2003-2007. Millennials = born 1984-2002. Gen X = born 1965-1983. Boomers = born 1946-1964.									
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2025</i> , conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.									

- **Three out of every five adults (62%) said that sin can be understood as “an act of disobedience against God.”** Americans are more comfortable describing sin as disobedience than rebellion (see below).
 - Viewing sin as disobedience is most common among blacks (66%), theologically-identified born-again Christians (92%), and those who attend either an Evangelical (85%) or Pentecostal church (89%). People least likely to accept that description include people of no religious faith (15%), LGBTQ people (39%), people associated with a non-Christian faith (45%), adults under 30 (46%), and residents of the Western states (49%).
- **About six out of 10 (61%) indicated that sin produces guilt, and such guilt is “often worse than the sin” that caused it.** With present-day culture so sensitive to feelings, it is perhaps not surprising to find disqualifying behavior less concerning than the damaged feelings caused by the behavior.

- There were few subgroups that strayed more than a few percentage points from the norm on this factor. The most noteworthy outliers were Catholics, who were well-above the norm in acknowledging the effect of sin-induced guilt (73%). At the other end of the scale were adults who have no religious association, who were the types of people least likely to decry the impact of guilt resulting from sin (28%).
- ***Slightly more than half of all adults (56%) believe that “sin is a life-changer.”*** Placed in context, this means that one-third of the adults who believe that sin exists reject the idea that life is significantly impacted by sin.
 - Among the segments most likely to embrace the idea that sin is a life-altering choice are theologically-identified born-again Christians and adults who attend independent or non-denominational Christian churches. Among the groups least likely to buy that concept are individuals who are atheist or agnostic.
- ***One of the more telling discoveries is that only slightly more than half of all adults (56%) contend that “sin is rebellion against God.”*** Apparently, millions of Americans conceive of sin as a behavior whose acceptability is determined apart from its relationship to God’s will.
 - The groups that are most likely to believe that perspective are theologically-identified born-again Christians (82%), people who attend an Evangelical (82%) or independent or non-denominational Christian church (80%). The least likely adherents of that point of view are people with no religious faith (15%), self-proclaimed atheists and agnostics (21%), and Asians (42%).
- ***About half (53%) define sin as “intentional choices that you know are morally wrong.”*** That half of the population, however, was divided between 12% who said those choices “don’t matter much” and the 41% who said those choices “matter spiritually.”
 - A few people (4%) minimized sin as “unintentional mistakes;” 14% diminished the significance of sin by claiming there are no absolutes in the realm of sin (i.e., sins are “inappropriate choices; but what qualifies as a sin is different for every person”); and 13% positioned sin as a kind of customized, religious distinctive. One out of six adults (16%) did not provide a definition because they maintained there is no such thing as sin.

The Sources of People’s Insight into Sin

People get their points of view about sin from a variety of places. Previous research by Dr. Barna and the Cultural Research Center have shown that foundational beliefs about sin are developed prior to a person’s teen years, and rarely change much after that point. Consequently, many of the ideas that adults consider in relation to sin are more likely to reinforce existing perspectives than to develop new ones.

Nevertheless, adults take cues on sin from a variety of places, whether the result is to inform or reinforce their ideas. The survey found that most adults have three or more sources of insight regarding sin that they trust.

Among adults who believe that sin exists, the sources most often trusted to provide insight into sin include the Bible (listed by 62%); religious or church-based teaching (47%); personal feelings (43%); reason or logic (40%); guidance from trusted people (34%); laws and public policies (25%); prevailing standards in society (24%); tradition (23%); and lessons learned in school (20%). Fewer than one out of every five adults who believe that sin is real said they get their insights about sin from sacred literature other than the Bible (15%) or from the beliefs of the majority (8%).

Barna highlighted some distinctions among the various population subgroups studied. For instance, self-identified Christians were more likely than other adults to turn to the Bible and religious teaching for their insights regarding sin, while people aligned with a non-Christian faith were more likely to rely upon reason, tradition, the media, and the thinking of the majority. Atheists and agnostics stood out as more likely than either Christians or people of non-Christian faiths to trust their feelings and their logic.

He noted that Protestants (77%) were significantly more likely than Catholics (62%) to seek information about sin from the Bible. Catholics were comparatively more likely to rely upon laws, reason, school lessons, and tradition for their insights into sin.

Also of note, adults who attend an Evangelical church were equally likely as those who attend a mainline Protestant church to pursue information about sin from the Bible. However, those who attend a mainline church were significantly more likely than Evangelical church attenders to supplement biblical information with points of on sin drawn from their feelings, teaching from their church, tradition, and public policy.

Demographically, the survey revealed that the Bible was most frequently relied upon for insight into sin by Boomers (68%) and blacks (67%), while the segments least prone to use it included LGBTQ adults (43%), people from households making more than \$200,000 annually (47%), and Asians (55%).

Most Popular Sources of Information about Sin Among Religious Segments									
Information Source about Sin	All adults	Self- Identified Christian	Other Faith	Atheist/ Agnostic	Theologically Identified, born-again Christian	Prot- estant	Cath- olic	Evan- gelical	Main- line
Bible	62%	71%	39%	29%	86%	77%	62%	73%	75%
Religious/ church teaching	47	53	39	20	61	53	57	45	56
Your feelings	43	41	42	54	38	39	43	33	45
Reason, logic	40	38	43	51	35	33	45	32	36
Guidance from trusted people	34	34	31	33	33	33	36	32	33
Laws, public policies	25	25	28	23	21	22	31	21	27
Society standards	24	24	27	24	18	22	28	26	24
Tradition	23	23	31	19	20	19	29	16	21
School lessons	20	21	22	15	18	17	28	14	18
Sacred literature, besides Bible	15	15	20	13	15	12	18	9	13
Majority beliefs	8	8	16	4	3	7	9	6	7
<p>NOTE: The four columns of church-related data refer to the type of church the respondent attends most often.</p> <p>Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2025</i>, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.</p>									

Most Popular Sources of Information about Sin Among Generations and Races									
Information Source about Sin	All adults	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian
Bible	62%	58%	58%	63%	68%	62%	59%	68%	55%
Religious/ church teaching	47	32	43	45	60	49	43	42	38
Your feelings	43	37	42	42	48	46	41	33	32
Reason, logic	40	37	42	42	48	46	41	33	32
Guidance from trusted people	34	35	40	40	44	42	40	32	40
Laws, public policies	25	20	25	24	30	27	20	22	23
Society standards	24	26	23	22	29	25	21	22	38
Tradition	23	23	24	23	22	21	29	22	36
School lessons	20	23	20	19	20	20	18	20	26
Sacred literature, besides Bible	15	13	17	14	13	14	17	14	21
Majority beliefs	8	14	11	7	2	6	8	11	19
Abbreviations: Gen Z = adult portion born 2003-2007. Millennials = born 1984-2002. Gen X = born 1965-1983. Boomers = born 1946-1964. Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2025</i> , conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N = 2,000 adults, fielded May 2025.									

Our Misguided Sin Views

The religious faith of Americans is complicated, as exemplified by their inconsistent beliefs about sin. Those inconsistencies generate numerous logical conflicts regarding their perspectives. As an example, Barna pointed to the fact that millions of Americans simultaneously contend that sin exists, define sin as “an act of disobedience against God” or “rebellion against God,” and yet claim that they do not believe in the existence of God.

Having spent more than four decades studying the religious beliefs and behavior of the American people, Barna commented that such disparities are a hallmark of American religious faith.

“Americans tend to spend comparatively little time studying faith, reflecting on what we have learned, and searching to eliminate the paradoxes, impurities, and impossibilities in our personal belief system. We often resist accepting long-held perspectives on aspects of the Christian faith in favor of creating a customized version of Christianity that provides personal comfort rather than truth and reliability. As time goes on, Americans have shown their increasing desire to satisfy feelings rather than logic. Our muddled theology of sin is a prime example of a deeply personal albeit immature and imprecise faith conviction.”

There are ironies embedded within those convictions, too.

“Selfishness is one of the attributes that characterize people whose focus is on living for personal satisfaction and gain rather than the glory of and obedience to God,” Barna said. “For instance, consider that three-quarters of adults argue that the guilt produced by sin is often worse than the sin itself. To focus on the personal feelings one’s sin generates rather than what our sin does to God, our relationship with Him, and its impact on our life betrays what we love the most. That widespread mindset reflects another ingrained sin: esteeming ourselves more than God, and worrying more about our happiness and comfort in the moment than our eternal standing with God.”

In the end, the researcher suggested that America’s views on sin indicate that we do not take the Bible as truth to live by.

“As a nation, we have generally made peace with all but the most egregious or personally painful sins,” Barna stated. “For America to be spiritually restored will require us to recognize the death grip that sin has on our minds, hearts, and souls. We seem to not grasp that repentance is not about mouthing words of remorse, but living in ways that prove that remorse. We appear to be comfortable with the idea that Jesus will save us when we go through the motions of confession but fail to experience the despair of committing offenses against Him and the determination to do something radical about our choices. We even fail to give God credit for producing that guilt within us as a wake-up call that we have broken His laws and His heart.”

Barna expressed hope that the research will cause people to reflect more deeply on sin and its consequences. He also encouraged church leaders to integrate more emphasis and wisdom related to sin in their teaching and conversations.

“If the Church is not distinct from the culture in its understanding of and response to sin, it loses its power and authority. As our nation is reeling from the tensions and sadness heightened by recent episodes of political violence, suicides, rampant crime, and other threats to our way of life and existence, the opportunity for the Church to restore sanity and security by unashamedly proclaiming the truths conveyed in the Bible is undeniable. The only question is who will be bold

enough to steadfastly share God’s truths with a people who so desperately need His forgiveness and loving guidance.”

About the *American Worldview Inventory*

The data in this report are part of the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual nationwide survey that examines a wide variety of aspects of the worldview of U.S. adults. The current worldview research was generated in two waves of surveys fielded during the first half of 2025. The *American Worldview Inventory 2025* is the sixth year of the annual surveys.

The data reported in this report were collected in the second of those two waves, conducted in May 2025, among a national, demographically-representative sample of 2,000 adults (age 18 or older). The survey contained 97 questions and the average duration of the survey experience for respondents was 20 minutes. The sample was constructed from among the members of a national research panel managed by Braun Research and Fulcrum as part of the Lucid national panel of survey respondents. A probability sample of this size would have an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon both sampling and non-sampling activity.

The *American Worldview Inventory 2025: A National Study for Strengthening the Worldview of Americans* from Dr. George Barna is designed to examine trends in American beliefs about God, truth, sin, and salvation. It seeks to understand key aspects of American faith and to provide practical insights for building a stronger biblical worldview in our nation. This major research from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University is intended to describe and understand the nation’s current worldview landscape and to guide improvements. In total, there will be 12 reports released from the *American Worldview Inventory 2025*.

Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)* is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. The same questions are asked in each of the worldview incidence studies conducted by the Cultural Research Center (CRC), facilitating reliable tracking data from year to year. Additional worldview-related research is part of the *AWVI* project, allowing researchers at CRC to look beyond incidence data, digging deeper into an array of worldview components toward understanding the genesis of existing worldview and how to more effectively move people toward a biblical worldview.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. Each year’s reports, released to the public at no cost via CRC’s website (www.CulturalResearchCenter.com), are also compiled in book form and produced at the beginning of each subsequent year, published by Arizona Christian University Press. Those books are available at CRC’s [Publications page](#) or on Amazon.

About the ACU Worldview Assessment

The [ACU Worldview Assessment](#) is a powerful online tool designed to measure and strengthen a person's worldview. Developed by Dr. George Barna and based on 40+ years of research, this 15-minute assessment reveals how a person's beliefs and behaviors align with biblical truth—and how to grow spiritually.

The ACU Worldview Assessment measures worldview beliefs and behaviors in five basic categories (Bible, Truth, and Morals; God, Creation, and History; Faith Practices; Sin, Salvation, and God Relationship; and Lifestyle, Behavior, and Relationships). It also evaluates the “Seven Cornerstones” of the Biblical Worldview. Dr. Barna's exhaustive worldview research shows that if these seven basic worldview concepts—or cornerstones—are in place, a person is far more likely to possess or develop a biblical worldview. Only the ACU Worldview Assessment identifies and measures these worldview-building basics.

The ACU Worldview Assessment is a *practical tool* for evaluating and improving worldview. And there is a specifically tailored version of the ACU Worldview Assessment for every need:

- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Individuals** -Designed specifically for adults to identify their worldview and discover areas for spiritual growth and personal worldview development.
- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Students** – Created by Dr. Barna in collaboration with ACU professors and other educational experts, to measure the worldview of students in grades 4, 8, and 12, using a pre- and post-test format. The student assessments are specifically designed for each grade level, making the questions age-appropriate and easier to understand, while maintaining the integrity of the results.

Dr. Barna's extensive research into childhood worldview development shows that an individual's worldview is essentially formed by age 13. This highlights the importance of strategic worldview training, especially in Christian schools, using the ACU Worldview Assessment to measure worldview development along the way.

- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Churches, Ministries, and Groups** – This version of the assessment is designed for use by churches, ministries, and other groups of adults.
- **The ACU Worldview Assessment for Colleges and Universities** – Designed in a pre- and post-test format tailored for Christian colleges and universities to use each academic year to assess the worldview of their students, and understand the effect of their university's teaching and community on their student's worldview development.

Visit www.ACUWorldview.com to experience the ACU Worldview Assessment.

And learn more about the new assessment in our full report, [“Arizona Christian University Unveils Groundbreaking Worldview Assessment from Dr. George Barna and the Cultural Research Center.”](#)

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding worldview and cultural transformation. National studies completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and recent election-related activity and political views.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind *ACU Student Worldview Inventory* is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final time just prior to graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students from a longitudinal perspective.

Research studies conducted by CRC are led by Dr. George Barna. Barna is a veteran of more than 40 years of national public opinion research, having previously guided the Barna Group (which he sold in 2009), and the American Culture and Faith Institute. His research findings have been the subject of more than 60 books he has authored or co-authored, many of which have become national bestsellers. His most recent bestseller is [*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul*](#) (Arizona Christian University Press, 2023).

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. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.