

2025 American Worldview Inventory – Report #11

**Most Americans Say Eternal Salvation
Demands a Blend of Works and Grace**

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(GLENDALE, AZ) Americans typically believe that Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave is not sufficient to secure their eternal salvation. Instead, they believe that experiencing eternal peace and joy requires a blend of personal works and God’s grace.

A new report from the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University based on a national survey of 2,000 adults also reveals that expectations regarding what happens after death—a key component of worldview—vary substantially, even among those who claim to be Christian.

For many of those individuals, Heaven may be a place of permanent peace or rest, but without the presence of God. Regardless, more than nine out of 10 Americans who align with the Christian faith contend they will experience that condition of never-ending bliss, whether God is there or not.

Predicting the Future

While the survey found that 84% of adults—including 95% of self-professed Christians—believe that there is such a thing as sin, millions of American adults do not believe their sinfulness will resign them to a future of fire and brimstone. Overall, a mere 3% of adults believe their soul, spirit, or essence will experience unending torment and punishment.

All told, more than three out of five people (63%) expect an eternity filled with peace and rest. One out of five (19%) anticipate some form of reincarnation—either joining with the universe or returning to earth as another life form. About one out of every eight adults (13%) contends they will simply cease to exist. Among those who expect a future of peace and serenity, one-fifth (13% of all adults) foresee a period of purification for their soul before spending the rest of time in that state of bliss.

Spiritual optimism is widespread. Among those who say they are Christian, three out of four (77%) said they will enjoy eternal comfort and peace. That eternal reward, however, was described in three different ways. Half of the self-identified Christians (52%) say after they die,

their soul, spirit, or essence will reside in the presence of God—a condition widely described as “Heaven.”

But about one out of every eight (13%) said it will be a two-step process for them, in which their soul will first go through a period of purification before experiencing peace and rest for the duration of eternity. That expectation was more than twice as common among Catholics as Protestants.

The third expected outcome, anticipated by 12%, is experiencing eternal peace, serenity and joy without any divine being present. Surprisingly, Protestants, Catholics, and people of non-Christian faiths were equally likely to predict this future for themselves.

Post-Life Expectations

Belief about soul, spirit, or essence after death	All 18+	Self-identified Christian	Not a self-identified Christian	Protestant	Catholic	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boom
It will reside in the presence of God	39%	52%	13%	63%	38%	28%	34%	41%	49%
I will experience eternal peace, serenity and joy without any divine being present	12	12	11	11	14	17	13	12	8
I will go through a period of purification before a time of peace and rest	12	13	8	9	21	14	13	11	9
I will cease to exist in any form or place	13	7	25	5	8	13	12	12	12
It will join with the universe	10	5	20	4	7	10	12	10	10
It will return to earth as another life form	9	6	14	5	8	12	11	8	6
It will experience torment and punishment	3	3	3	3	4	5	4	3	*
Other outcome	3	1	7	1	1	1	2	3	4

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

Abbreviations: Gen Z = adult portion born 2003-2007. Millennials = born 1984-2002. Gen X = born 1965-1983. Boomers = born 1946-1964.

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

The survey discovered that even among those most likely to fit some description of being “born-again” through Jesus Christ, there were significant differences—and points of conflict—with the scriptures. Incidence levels for each of the three uniquely defined “born-again” segments the researchers created and studied varied substantially.

- The first data-defined segment, people who call themselves “born-again,” represents one-third of the public (33%). More than four out of five of them (82%) believe they will experience eternal life in peace and serenity, including six out of 10 (62%) who say that will include the presence of God.

Overall, this group was perhaps the most biblically confused of the three born-again segments examined. Just 58% of them believe every person will be personally judged by God. More than four out of 10 say good people can earn their salvation (41%), one-third believe in reincarnation (35%), one-third say there are many viable paths to salvation (35%).

Further, a large minority says a simple admission of sinning constitutes repentance (40%), and one-quarter of the group does not believe that confessing their sins is very important in their salvation process. One out of every three does not consider themselves to be a sinner. Ultimately, just six out of 10 of the self-described born-again segment believes they will live eternally in the presence of God.

- A second data-defined born-again segment included those who claimed they had confessed all of their sins to Jesus, embraced Him as their savior, and believed that after they die their soul, spirit, or essence will experience eternal peace and rest. That segment represented close to half of all American adults (43%).

However, the worldview of this group is a jumble of biblical and cultural ideas. While nine out of 10 believed that everyone will be personally judged by God, a majority also believed that “a person who is generally good, or does enough good things for other people, will earn a place in Heaven.”

There is a widespread misunderstanding among these people about the biblical notion of repentance. Nearly half of this group believes repentance is simply admitting to sinfulness, regardless of future behavior. Half of the segment also said there are many viable paths to eternal salvation.

- The third research-defined born-again segment was based on a more detailed perspective. This group is made up of adults who claimed they have confessed all of their sins to Jesus; prayed to Christ to forgive them for those sins; changed their thinking and behavior related to such sins; specifically asked Jesus to save them from the consequences of their sins; and believed that after they die their soul, spirit, or essence will live in the presence of God. Defined in this manner, one out of four adults fit the characterization (27%).

But even this segment was confused in their spiritual understanding of sin and salvation. For instance, although 95% knew that God will judge all people individually, nearly half

of this segment (42%) believed that good people can earn Heaven. More than one-third (38%) said repentance only takes admission of sin, not behavioral change. One-fourth (27%) argued that there are paths to salvation apart from Jesus.

The Post-Life Breakdown

The survey explored 13 different ideas about what is very important in determining the post-life experience their soul, spirit, or essence will go through. Here is the breakdown, from the most common to the least common point of view among all those surveyed.

- 57% - Embracing Jesus as your savior
- 55% - Honoring and serving God above all else
- 54% - Consistently demonstrating strong moral character
- 54% - Confessing all of your sins to Jesus
- 49% - Living a transformed, righteous life
- 49% - Consistently and sincerely worshiping your god
- 45% - How successfully you obeyed all of God's laws/commands
- 38% - How well you understood yourself
- 38% - How meaningfully you addressed suffering and need
- 36% - The degree of harmony you achieved with the spiritual world
- 36% - The balance between your good deeds and bad deeds
- 35% - Your devotion to the path to perfection
- 34% - Participating in your faith's sacred rites and sacraments

The combinations of ideas about what matters when it comes to salvation underscore how much “theological noise” exists within people's worldview related to this central focus of the Christian Church—what happens after death.

For instance, if a person said they consider embracing Jesus Christ as their Savior to be “very important” for the good of their eternal soul, spirit, or essence, that person was also likely to deem more than a half-dozen other actions to be similarly important. Those often included biblically defensible choices such as confessing all of their sins to Jesus, living a transformed and righteous life, and honoring and serving God above all else.

However, they were also likely to include biblically indefensible or questionable behaviors such as personal devotion to the path of spiritual perfection and to include their degree of harmony with the spiritual world.

The survey results showed that only one of the 13 behaviors examined was deemed very important by a majority deemed very important among Gen Z adults: consistently demonstrating strong character. They were the only adult generation having a minority saying it was very important to confess all their sins to Jesus (44%), to embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior (48%), and to honor and serve God above all else (45%).

There were also major differences between the four primary ethnic/racial segments in America.

- Blacks were more likely than whites, Hispanics, and Asians to consider living a transformed life, honoring, and serving God above all else, obeying God's laws and commands, consistently and sincerely worshipping God, and being devoted to the path of perfection to be very important in determining their soul's destiny.
- Hispanics emerged as the segment most likely to elevate the importance of achieving a good balance between their good and bad deeds.
- Asians were the least likely to affirm the importance of each of the 13 behaviors evaluated. In fact, there was not a single behavior examined that a majority of Asians felt was very important to ascertaining their soul's outcome. Asians were the only racial/ethnic group for which a minority believed that their soul, spirit, or essence will experience eternal peace or the presence of God. Half of the segment (50%) said their soul will either join with the universe, be reincarnated in another life form, or cease to exist.

Which Beliefs “Christian” Segments Embrace Related to Eternal Outcomes

Belief	All 18+	Self-identified Christian	Not a self-identified Christian	Theologically identified, born-again Christian	Protestant	Catholic	Evangelical	Pentecostal	Mainline	Indep/Non-Denom
Every person will be personally judged by God	63%	78%	32%	95%	83%	74%	84%	86%	82%	84%
A person who is generally good, or does enough good things for other people, will earn a place in Heaven	48	53	38	42	41	73	43	41	43	35
There are many paths to eternal salvation; you can choose whichever one you prefer	40	41	38	27	34	54	37	34	35	31
Admitting that you have sinned is all you need to do to repent	36	40	27	38	39	44	48	48	36	37
A living person may be baptized on behalf of a dead person and extend saving grace through that act to the dead person	17	19	14	10	15	24	21	16	14	13

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

Abbreviations: Indep/Non-Denom = Independent or non-denominational Christian church

Definition: Theologically-identified, born-again Christian: have confessed all of their sins to Jesus; prayed to Christ to forgive them for those sins; have changed their thinking and behavior related to such sins; specifically asked Jesus to save them from the consequences of their sins; and believe that after they die their soul, spirit, or essence will live in the presence of God.

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

Comfortable Ideas about Eternity Foster Earthly Comfort

Dr. Barna, who has been conducting research related to beliefs about life after death for more than four decades, noted that despite the importance of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith, so many people aligned with the faith do not understand His reason for spending time on Earth.

“There remains a shocking degree of misunderstanding among Christians regarding sin, repentance, forgiveness, and salvation,” the researcher explained. “Tens of millions of people who attend Christian churches every week, and who consider themselves to be followers of Christ and eternally secure, do not seem to understand that repentance is necessary for salvation, and that repentance demands a change in behavior.”

He explained, “Repentance is not merely sorrow over misdeeds. It must include a determined effort to change both mind and actions to avoid committing the same sins in the future. Simply apologizing to God, or saying a prayer asking for forgiveness, without a real effort to change the lifestyle, does not fit with biblical teaching about forgiveness and grace.”

The study results raised another issue that concerned Barna. “Millions of people who regularly attend Christian churches believe that eternal salvation does not depend on the sacrifice of Christ because of our sins. They don’t understand this fundamental tenet of Christian belief.”

“Instead, we have a majority of self-described Christians hedging their eternal bets by integrating multiple means of salvation into their personal security plan. They say they are relying on Jesus to wash away their sins, but they also expect their good works to gain them points with God, and they retain the possibility of other pathways to eternal peace, just in case. This multi-faceted salvation strategy enables them to avoid stress over the whole issue—especially for those who also harbor the possibility that there may be no type of life after death anyway,” Barna said.

Barna, who has written numerous books about the connection between faith and lifestyle, concluded that the baseline problem is Americans are biblically illiterate.

“The presence of unbiblical beliefs in the minds of most Christian-leaning Americans reminds us that most people are information collectors rather than biblically consistent followers of Christ. Americans are more determined to be comfortable than biblically right. That preference will produce profound eternal effects for each of us,” he explained.

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.