

TRUTH MATTERS

Why the loss of truth should be a serious concern for Christians and the church



We are losing
the idea of
absolute truth

Absolute truth is something that is true at all times and in all places. It is something that is always true no matter what the circumstances. It is a fact that cannot be changed.

(Wikipedia)

Evidence

A new study from the Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University shows that some **58% of Americans** surveyed no longer believe that and instead say it's up to the individual to decide what is true or moral.

The American Worldview Inventory 2020 concluded that "belief in absolute moral truth rooted in God's word is rapidly eroding among all American adults, whether churched or unchurched, within every political segment, and within every age group." Shockingly, that does include American Christians, those who have historically pointed to the Bible as the source of absolute truth and the guide to how we should live our lives.

The study found that evangelicals, defined as those believing the Bible to be the true, reliable word of God, amazingly, are **almost as likely to reject absolute moral truth (46%) as to accept it (48%).**

Only 43% of those surveyed who identify as born-again Christians still embrace absolute truth. Those with a decidedly biblical worldview were two-and-a-half times more likely than other people to say that God is the basis of truth (96% compared to 38%). In fact, of those surveyed, **nearly nine out of ten adults (85%) who have a biblical worldview reject the idea that moral absolutes do not exist and therefore people must create their own moral standards.**

Evidence

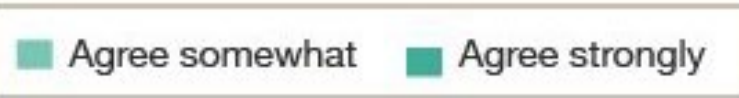
Among Christians, just half (54%) identify God as the basis of truth. Within that group, those whose beliefs position them as "born again" Christians—seven out of ten (69%) say that God is the basis of truth. While a similar proportion adopts that same belief among those who attend either evangelical (72%) or Pentecostal (70%) churches, the percentage drops precipitously among those who attend either a mainline Protestant (37%) or Catholic (43%) church.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a generational divide in survey findings. Younger people, adults under age 30, were notably less likely than older adults to select God as the foundation of truth (31% compared to 45% among older adults).

Segments among whom a majority denied the existence of absolute moral truth included:

- LGBTQ adults (73%)
- Political liberals (67%)
- Hispanics (65%)
- Blacks (63%)
- Democrats (63%)
- People under age 50 (62%)

Evidence: a survey by the Barna Group, July, 2015



■ *Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know.*



Evidence: a survey by the Barna Group, July, 2015

■ Agree somewhat ■ Agree strongly

■ *Every culture must determine what is acceptable morality for its people.*



Evidence: a survey by the Barna Group, July, 2015

■ Agree somewhat ■ Agree strongly

■ *The Bible provides us with moral truths which are the same for all people in all situations, without exception.*



Evidence: the Pew Research Center

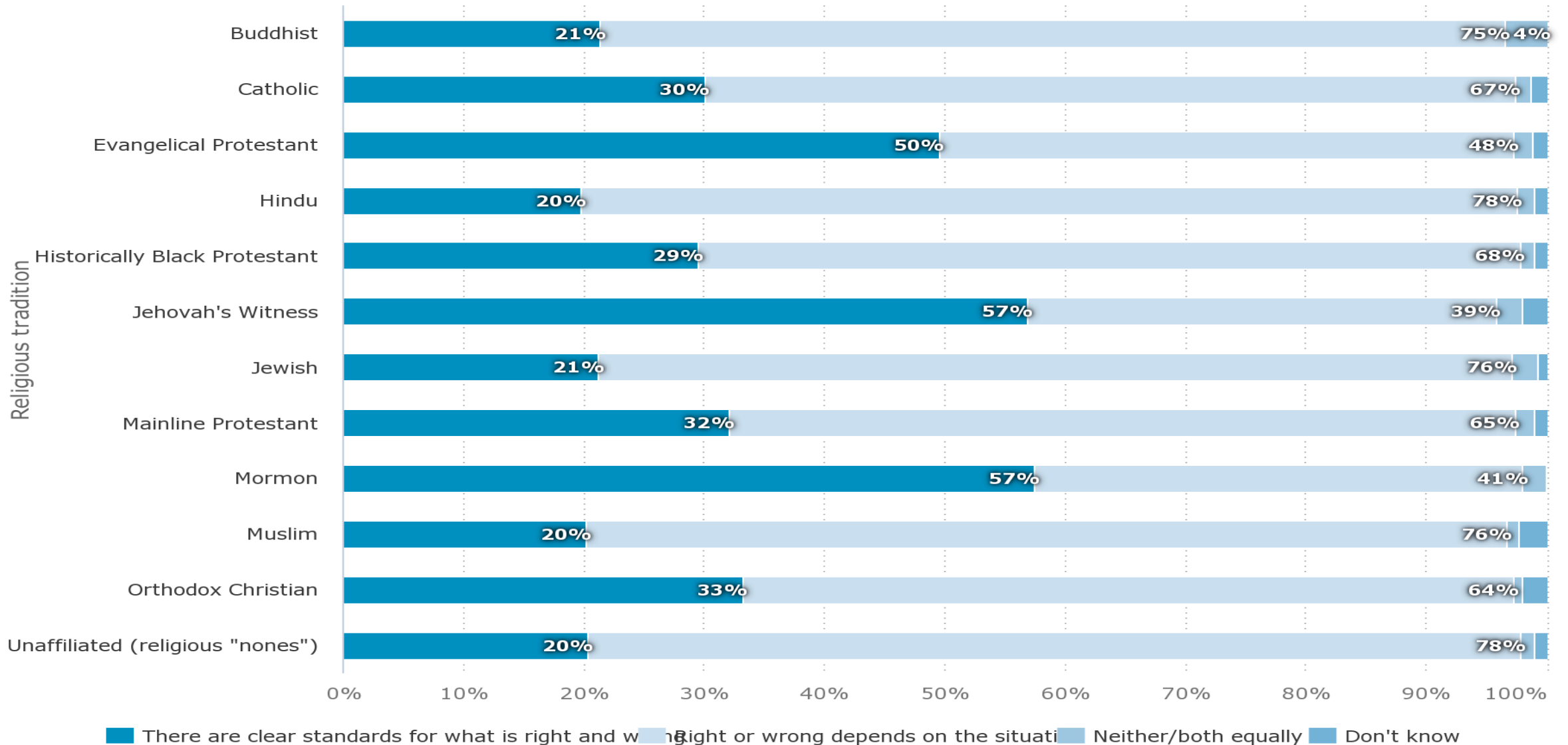
The following charts from the Pew Research Center show:

- Belief in absolute standards for right and wrong by religious group
- Age distribution by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong
- Generational cohort by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong
- Belief in God by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong
- Attendance at religious services by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong

<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-absolute-standards-for-right-and-wrong/>

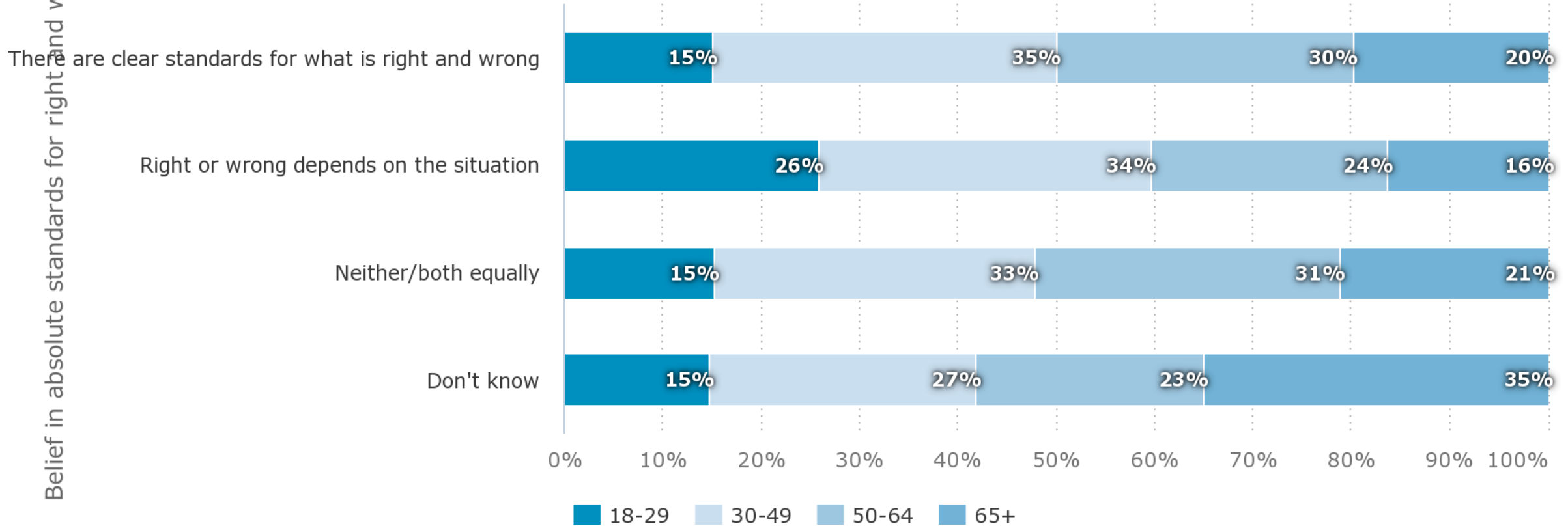
Belief in absolute standards for right and wrong by religious group

% of adults who say...



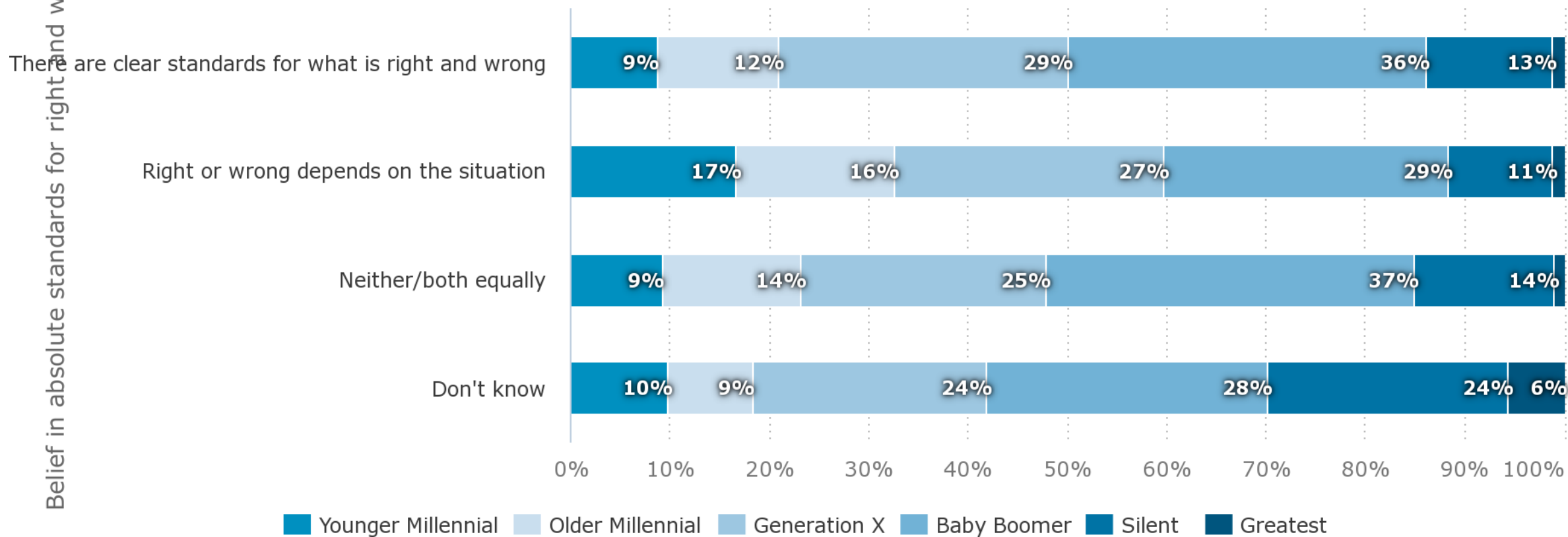
Age distribution by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong

% of adults who are ages...



Generational cohort by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong

% of adults who are...

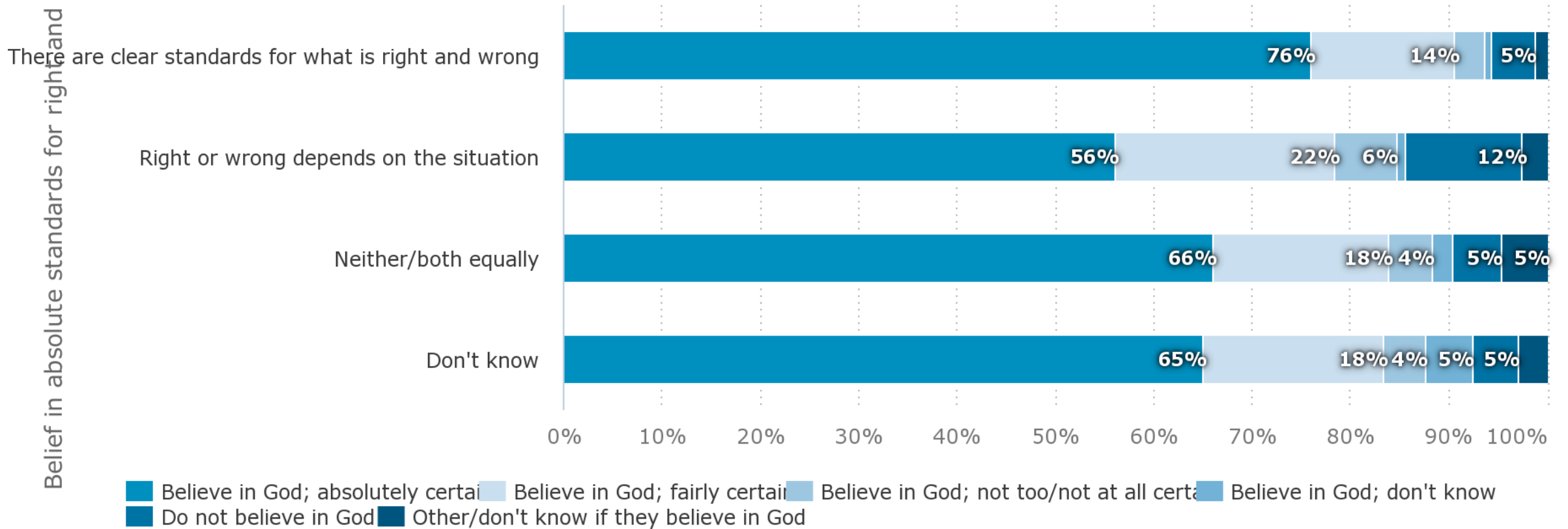


PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Millennials: those born between 1981-1996 (currently 24-40 year olds) GenX: those born between 1965-1980 (currently 41-55 year olds)
 Boomers: those born between 1946-1964 (currently 56-74 year olds) Silent Generation: those born between 1928 and 1945 (currently 75-92 year olds)

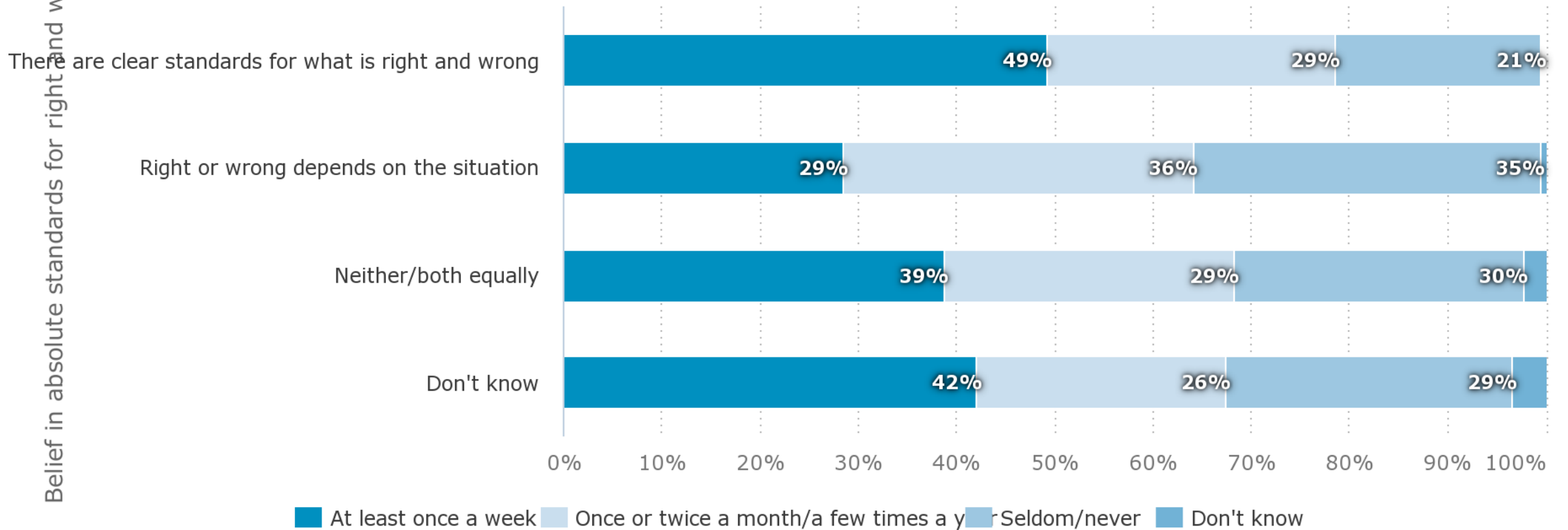
Belief in God by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong

% of adults who say they...



Attendance at religious services by belief in existence of standards for right and wrong

% of adults who attend religious services...



Evidence

There is a lot more information about worldviews, as well as research on other topics at:

<https://www.arizonachristian.edu/culturalresearchcenter/research/>

What do we mean by the word truth?

Truth:

the true or actual state of a matter.

conformity with fact or reality; verity.

a verified or indisputable fact, proposition, principle, or the like.

the state or character of being true.

actuality or actual existence.

the state of being the case

the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality

Dictionary.com

*Inc Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.
(Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).*

What do we mean by the word truth?

True:

in accordance with fact or reality

being in accordance with the actual state of affairs

*Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., Concise Oxford English Dictionary
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).*

*Inc Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.
(Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).*

What do we mean by the word truth?

Summary:

What is true is what is in complete accordance with reality or with fact.

Truth is that which conforms completely with reality or fact.

Notice here what is NOT said in these definitions:

Truth is that which is in accordance with what one personally believes.

Truth is that which is in accordance with what culture believes.

What do we mean by absolute truth?

Absolute truth is something that is true at all times and in all places.

It is something that is always true no matter what the circumstances.

It is a fact that cannot be changed.

(Wikipedia)

Is there such a thing as absolute truth?

Just asking this question answers it.

This question is looking for a 'yes' or a 'no' response, but if there is no absolute truth, we can't give either response. We can say, "I don't know" or "For me there is no such thing as absolute truth" but anything more admits that there is some true answer to the question which applies to all people.

If one honestly wants to know the answer to this question, he/she has already admitted the answer: there is absolute truth or else the question is meaningless.

For the Christian who is well-versed in scripture the answer is an unequivocal "Yes."

Why the Christian would give this answer is something we will turn to later in our discussion.

Why people reject the idea of absolute truth

Some object to the idea of absolute truth for philosophical or intellectual reasons:

- **So-called truth is used to control or oppress.**

Acknowledge: truth is a powerful thing. But that doesn't make truth alone oppressive. It is how truth is used, abused, altered, or controlled that can make it oppressive.

- **Truth is totally subjective.**

If that is so, then so is this statement. That is, you feel truth is totally subjective because that is your subjective feeling about truth. Unfortunately, that means there is no actual truth outside of you. So you cannot even make a claim like this and try to apply it to anyone else. To have truth we have to go beyond subjectivity.

- **Truth is invented by cultures.**

Acknowledge: some truths are culturally bound, that is, they have arisen from within a culture because they help that culture survive. Outside that culture they may be irrelevant and not considered true.

It is also true that some cultures value some truths above others. (Think of an Amazonian tribe versus a Western medical school. The tribe values tradition, superstition, spirits, and folklore as the explanation way of treatment for disease. The Western medical school values scientific knowledge and treatment of disease.) This does not make culture the arbiter of ultimate or absolute truth.

For something to be absolutely true it must transcend culture. It must apply in all cultures or come from outside all cultures.

Why people reject the idea of absolute truth

Some object to the idea of absolute truth for philosophical or intellectual reasons:

- **Truth changes.**

Acknowledge: some things once thought true are no longer thought true. To admit that is not to also admit that all truths are changeable. For something to be absolutely true it cannot be changed by increases in knowledge or understanding.

Why people reject the idea of absolute truth

Some reject absolute truth for personal reasons:

- **Rejection of absolute truth makes one totally in control of their life.**

This is one reason that the rejection of absolute truth appeals so strongly to teens and young adults.

This is the approach Satan took with Eve in the garden.

- **Rejection of absolute truth relieves one of moral guilt and allows one to live as he/she wants.**

If I am allowed to define moral truth, then I can define it to allow for whatever behavior I want to be involved in. This removes the possibility of guilt.

- **Rejection of absolute truth makes it easier to live in a world where most other people reject absolute truth.**

This is likely why many parents and friends of gays and lesbians often 'change their mind' about the morality of such orientations. It also explains why so many young adults who fear ostracism or rejection choose to accept the rejection of absolute truth by their peers.

Why people reject the idea of absolute truth

Some insist on filtering what can be considered absolutely true:

- **Filter out what goes against my view or what I want to do**

If your truth offends me or makes me feel repressed or ostracized, your truth is outlawed. It is a power play to repress me.

Of course, that means your truth which may be offensive to me or others stands above the standard of what is objectionable. Your truth is OK and mine is not. You can repress what I believe but I cannot repress what you believe.

- **Filter out what a controlling group doesn't want you to believe**

If your truth runs contrary to what this group wants people to believe, you are not allowed to hold or express that 'truth.' This group is allowed to have absolute truths but only they are allowed to determine what they are.

These positions are really about controlling the truth, not whether truth exists (even truth that makes you uncomfortable.)

Why people reject the idea of absolute truth

- **Some limit absolute truth to what can be scientifically tested.**

This rules out claiming truth for religious or moral ideas which cannot be tested scientifically.

This position is also about controlling the truth by defining ahead of time where and how it can be found. It does not by itself determine whether absolute truth exists outside of the scientifically testable realms they will allow it to exist.

Should we discuss the truth?

Some would say it is a waste of time.

If truth cannot be known or doesn't exist, it is a waste of time to discuss it. Even if there is such a thing as universal truth, there are other more existential matters to focus on (like being happy, making a living, etc.).

(Interestingly, even those who deny absolute truth have to discuss truth. It isn't self-evident that truth, or absolute truth doesn't exist.)

Some would say it will lead to some people (or groups) gaining control over others.

To discuss truth is ultimately a power play to convince people that one group has the truth and therefore other groups need to submit to their truth.

It is true that we should submit to the truth if it exists. But that doesn't mean that searching for or discussing the truth is itself a power act.

(Note that when refuses to discuss the possibility of truth and/or what might be true, he/she is trying to gain control of the discussion. That is a power play.)

Should we discuss the truth?

Some would say truth is a personal matter and it is no one else's business what they consider to be true.

To discuss truth is to invade their privacy and would be a personal affront.

Response: All truth (if it exists) has consequences.

Knowing the truth and following it will free us from bad consequences and enable us to enjoy beneficial consequences.

We see the acknowledgement of this all around us even among people who dispute that there is any such thing as universal truth:

1. Should we eat fatty, cholesterol rich foods or avoid them?
2. Should we exercise regularly or should we not?
3. Should we get flu shot (COVID vaccine) or not?
4. Should we treat people badly or treat people well?
5. Should we have a fair legal system or one that is unjust?

Because truth has consequences it is only wise to determine if truth exists, and if so, to determine what is true.

What Makes Something True?

Personal belief makes a thing true

Some believe that a thing is true only once they believe it. For them, the act of believing makes something true. We therefore can't call someone else wrong if they believe differently from us. Truth is totally personal and subjective.

Personal feelings makes a thing true

Some people believe something is true because they feel it is true. Truth is totally personal and subjective.

Unfortunately, feelings can mislead us, and they can change. That means we may suffer the consequences for following something we felt at one time was true and later discovered not to be true. Feelings are too immediate and volatile to be a useful source of what is true.

Personal experience makes a thing true

Some people believe something is true because of their experience. (They've tried different things out and have settled on the one that they believe works for them.) Truth is totally personal, though it may have some basis in objective experience.

The trouble is what seems to work now may have unforeseen consequences later and we'll conclude it really wasn't true or right in the first place. Our time frame for deciding from our experience is too short to be sure something is true.

What Makes Something True?

Cultural experience makes a thing true

Some would substitute the experiences of their culture for personal experience in determining what is true. If their group or culture has determined something to be true, then all are expected to believe in it. People outside the culture or group cannot pass judgment on that belief since they are not part of the culture.

Evaluation

Personal beliefs, experiences, and feelings, as well as what we've been taught by our culture, do or can act as truths to us.

However:

1. This doesn't rule out that truths may exist beyond the ones we personally believe, have experienced, feel, or have been conditioned by our culture or group to accept.
2. This doesn't make such 'truths' actual truths.
3. This doesn't make such 'truths' universally true or even applicable to a single other person.
4. Absolute truth must correspond to reality regardless of whether we believe in it or not, have experienced it or not, feel it or not, or whether our culture or group believes it or not.

What Makes Something True?

If something is universally true/absolute truth:

1. It cannot be the result of cultural conditioning, personal beliefs, emotions, or experiences.
2. It must
 1. transcend culture/ be true in every culture
 2. It must go beyond being determined subjectively
 3. It must not be able to be changed by increased knowledge or understanding
3. It must, therefore, must come from outside of ourselves (our beliefs, experiences, feelings, and culture), from a source that is unchanging and completely knowledgeable.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Truth?

Without truth no one can be truly free.

John 8:31–32 (NASB95)

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Jesus is the embodiment of truth.

John 14:6 (NASB95)

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Ephesians 4:21 (NASB95)

if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

Jesus brought truth into the world

John 1:17 (NASB95)

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Truth?

God is called a God of truth

Psalm 31:5 (NASB95)

Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.

All God does is said to be done in truth

Psalm 111:7–8 (NASB95)

The works of His hands are truth and justice; All His precepts are sure.

They are upheld forever and ever; They are performed in truth and uprightness.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Truth?

The Bible claims to be God's word and is therefore true and is the source of unchanging truth.

2 Samuel 7:28 (NASB95)

“Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant.”

Psalms 19:9 (NASB95)

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

Psalms 119:160 (NASB95)

The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

John 17:17 (NASB95)

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Truth?

Christianity is the way of truth

2 Peter 2:2 (NASB95)

Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

The Holy Spirit is needed to know the truth

John 16:13 (NASB95)

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

Salvation is needed to know the truth

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NASB95)

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Truth?

Satan is the father of lies and opposes the truth

John 8:44 (NASB95)

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Sinners suppress the truth

Romans 1:18 (NASB95)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

One sign of the end times is the rejection of truth

2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NASB95)

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

TRUTH MATTERS

Why the loss of truth should be a serious concern for Christians and the church



How do we recover truth for the Christian church and for Christian people?

1. We need a clear and unambiguous return to/recommitment to Biblical authority in the church.

Genesis 3:1 (NASB95)

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

This is the original temptation to question the authority of God's Word.

Pulpit – Bible Study classes – Small Groups – all must maintain the centrality and final authority of God's Word.

The temptation is to sound relevant, sensitive, caring, and to try not to turn anyone away. Preaching, curriculum, and teaching can be watered down in this pursuit and call for little response. Scripture can be made to function as a guide or a set of suggestions rather than the source of truth which demands obedience.

2. We must remain unapologetic about believing God's Word is the truth while maintaining sensitivity to those whose views differ.
3. We must help believers answer tough questions, helping them form Biblical answers and responses to current cultural and moral challenges.

How do we recover truth for the Christian church for and Christian people?

4. We must train parents to read the Bible with their children and to show how its truth applies to their lives and the questions our culture is asking.
5. We must help children and teens understand a Biblical worldview, the Bible's response to questions in our culture, how to respond to such questions, and how to remain in submission to the Bible.

The Cost of Believing the Truth

Moral liberalism has basically become the dominant moral commitment of the most influential sectors of American society, from the universities to the entertainment industry and the artistic centers and the mass media and the titans of Silicon Valley.

There is no social capital to be gained by joining a congregation defined by biblical truth. To the contrary, such membership will now destroy social capital... Are evangelicals and other conservative Christians in the United States prepared to be considered enemies of the regime?

Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020.