

"A brilliant assessment of our current cultural moment—loaded with insight, yet perfectly practical."

—GREGORY KOUKL, President of Stand to Reason

# FAITHFULLY



# DIFFERENT

Regaining Biblical Clarity  
in a Secular Culture

NATASHA CRAIN

Foreword by John Stonestreet, President of the Colson Center

“Natasha Crain’s *Faithfully Different* offers a brilliant assessment of our current cultural moment—loaded with insight, yet perfectly practical—in prose that is lucid and crystal clear. Crain strikes a healthy balance between her native kindness and gentleness and her sharp biblical thinking, helping you discover, finally, how all the crazy cultural pieces fit together *and* what to do about it.

“Crain’s work is not only an accessible primer for Christians who find themselves overwhelmed by the confusing array of challenges facing their convictions: from deconversions, to relativistic postmodernism, to critical race theory. She also sounds a sobering wake-up call to the multitudes who call themselves Christians yet who naively embrace secular ideologies and worldly ethics.

“In my opinion, Crain’s latest work is a masterful achievement, her best yet. If you read just one book to help you understand the present-day secular assaults on Christianity—and the biblical answers to them—make it *Faithfully Different*.”

**Gregory Koukl**, President, Stand to Reason (str.org); author of *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*

“This book is *faithfully different!* Clearly written, relevant, and winsome, it is a fair-minded defense of the Christian worldview. Read it, and you will find it to be of great benefit in understanding how you can withstand the cultural pressures that are swirling around you. A great book to help Christians, but also a wonderful gift to those who are on the margins, dealing with doubts and wondering how Christianity compares with the secular answers of our culture. Read it. Share it. And live it!”

**Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer**, Pastor Emeritus, Moody Church, Chicago; author of *We Will Not Be Silenced*

“In her earlier books, Natasha Crain has shown that she possesses a rare gift for unpacking complex ideas and making them clear and accessible. In *Faithfully Different*, she focuses on the struggles Christians face as society grows ever more secular. Those who follow Jesus are now a minority in Western culture, increasingly cast as extremists and treated as obstacles to social progress. Crain offers a reliable guide to navigating these new challenges.”

**Nancy Pearcey**, author of *Total Truth* and *Finding Truth*

“If ever there was a time to reaffirm biblical morality, revitalize our notions of biblical justice, and recommit to speaking the truth of the gospel, now is that time. Natasha Crain’s new book, *Faithfully Different*, is the right book written at the right moment. It will help you understand the challenges we face as a community of believers and equip you with the skills necessary to rise to these challenges. It’s a *must-read* book for a time such as ours. Get a copy for yourself and every Christian you care about.”

**J. Warner Wallace**, *Dateline*-featured cold-case detective; author of *Person of Interest* and *Cold-Case Christianity*

“Are you being deceived? How would you know? The inherent problem with being deceived is that you don’t know you’re being deceived. Natasha Crain brilliantly exposes how our secular culture often deceives us about God, Jesus, the Bible, social justice, sex, love, and morality. She then points us back to truth so we can live faithfully different lives to achieve our most important mission—knowing God through Jesus Christ and building His kingdom. Read this now!”

**Frank Turek**, President, CrossExamined.org; coauthor of *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*

“At Summit Ministries, we train tens of thousands of young adults every year in worldview and apologetics. I can tell you this: Natasha Crain gets it. She doesn’t shy away from a biblical response to tough questions. Just as important, she has her finger on the pulse of the culture. She knows its language and how to speak truth into it. *Faithfully Different* makes a powerful and very readable case that if Christians will learn to think Christianly—that is, with a Christian worldview—they can have a powerful impact in our confusing times. A bracing and timely challenge for the church.”

**Jeff Myers**, PhD, President, Summit Ministries

“Until recently, Christian ideals in America have gone largely unchallenged. But this is rapidly changing, which has left many Christians feeling opposed, silenced, and marginalized. How can we stand for biblical truth in a culture that views that truth to be bigoted, hateful, or harmful? *Faithfully Different* will give you the tools, resources, and inspiration to live out your Christian values in an increasingly secularized culture. This is the book every Christian needs in this cultural moment.”

**Alisa Childers**, author of *Another Gospel: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*; host of *The Alisa Childers Podcast*

“*Faithfully Different* is a timely wake-up call for Christians who want to live out their faith in our secular culture. This book is well researched, full of interesting stories, and grounded deeply in Scripture. I highly recommend it for Christians who want to know what it means practically to follow Jesus today.”

**Sean McDowell**, PhD, professor of apologetics, Biola University; author or coauthor of nearly 20 books, including *Chasing Love: Sex, Love, and Relationships in a Confused Culture*

“As a pastor, one of the biggest issues I see facing Christians today is that they don’t know how much secularism has impacted their worldview and crippled their ability to think biblically about things. *Faithfully Different* not only successfully identifies and explains the relevant worldview issues but does so in a way everyone can understand. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to understand and defend the Christian worldview.”

**Mike Winger**, President, BibleThinker Inc.

“Natasha Crain is absolutely correct. Christian, the world you knew just five years ago has dramatically changed, and not just among unbelievers. An aggressive secularism is sweeping into our churches that is anything but neutral. In the last two years alone, I’ve lost evangelical friends who not only promote ideas at odds with a biblical worldview, but who make agreement with those ideas an acid test for continued relationship. How can Christians live obediently and confidently in a world hell-bent on our total surrender? Natasha provides a refreshing answer that transcends arguing at a fever pitch: True Christians must be faithfully different. And that starts with understanding the secular worldviews that put fellow believers at risk in the first place. I thank God for this book. I now have a roadmap for living (and thriving!) as a minority.”

**Scott Klusendorf**, President, Life Training Institute; author of  
*The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture*

“Secularism’s growing influence and power is like a raging river, breaching banks and flooding everything in its path. Wading slightly into it risks getting swept in and dragged along with others who have been less careful and those who have jumped in for the ride. In *Faithfully Different*, Natasha Crain discusses the elements in secularism that seduce us away from our lover Jesus. She also takes readers by the hand and helps them recalibrate their thinking to one that is grounded in the truth of the biblical worldview. This book is well written, refreshingly insightful, and is truly an enjoyable read!”

**Michael Licona**, PhD, Associate Professor of  
Theology, Houston Baptist University

“I can’t express my excitement enough for the impact this book will have on people’s lives. I am not an alarmist, but I don’t know if there has been another time when there has been more confusion about beliefs and truth, even amongst Christians. Many Christians don’t know what they believe, so we see them accepting counterbiblical beliefs as normal. Natasha writes practical insights and shows why we must pay attention to the way so many are drifting from historical Christian truths. This is so incredibly critical, as what we believe impacts everything—our decisions, our values, our ethics—everything! I am so thankful for a practical guide to help us see clarity in the midst of so much fog and unclarity, why it matters, and what we can then do about it.”

**Dan Kimball**, author of *How (Not) to Read the Bible*; on staff  
at Vintage Faith Church; professor at Western Seminary



# FAITHFULLY DIFFERENT

NATASHA CRAIN



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

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Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney & Associates, Naples, Florida.

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Cover design by Faceout Studio

Interior design by KUHN Design Group

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### **Faithfully Different**

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8429-4 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8430-0 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021937794

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**Printed in the United States of America**

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 // 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Foreword

JOHN STONESTREET

Worldview matters.

Whether or not we realize it, everyone has a worldview. We all see the world through our most basic beliefs about life and the world. To be human is to live from a worldview. This feature of humanity separates us from all the other animals. Not only do we exist, we *think* about existing. We wonder why we are here, and what it all means. We imagine how the world could be different, and work to change it. We ask big questions like, Does life have purpose? Is there such a thing as right and wrong? Who decides?

We may not have thought much about our worldview, but it's there. Everyone we meet has a worldview too. This is why our disagreements can be so sharp. A worldview makes a big difference in how we think, how we make decisions, and how we relate with others.

It's common today to hear silly slogans like, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something." But, *what* we believe matters. Our ideas about life and the world have real consequences. After all, we live from our worldview. Our worldview will either help us see the world clearly or will keep us from seeing the world clearly. Our worldview will either help us live well or lead us astray.

Christians should have a Christian worldview, of course, but many don't. It's quite possible to have a sincere, private faith and to think and live like a pagan (or an atheist). In fact, many do. Many others

struggle to truly make sense of life, which is a real shame. After all, if Christianity is indeed the true account of the world, it's more than big enough for life's toughest questions and the most controversial issues of our culture.

Christians not intentional about what is true will still have a worldview, but it will do more harm for them than good. People will often, in fact, catch a worldview like they catch a cold. Too many Christians have been infected in their hearts and minds by the culture around them. Theirs is more of a *whirled* view made up of random and wrong beliefs collected from the culture around them instead of from Christ. Which is why it's important to know that...

Culture matters too.

All humans are, in many important ways, shaped by cultures. Our fashions, tastes, beliefs, and so many other things about us reflect the social environments into which we are born and live. In fact, a culture is most powerful in shaping us by what it makes seem *normal*.

If you've ever traveled to another country, you've likely experienced the feeling of, seemingly, being in a *different world*. You're not, of course. You're in a different culture, a place imagined and built differently by a different group of people. This is what humans do. We build worlds within the world.

In recent decades, the Western world (which includes the United States) has shifted in dramatic ways. Things once *unthinkable* are now *unquestionable*. Beliefs and behaviors once unimaginable now seem so, well, *normal*. Christians who aren't discerning will quickly find themselves embracing things that are wrong.

That's why this book, *Faithfully Different*, is so important and, if you read it carefully, will be so helpful. Natasha is a clear thinker and a captivating writer, with this knack for explaining things most essential, such as worldview and culture. Not only does she help her readers understand what they need to *know*, she helps them *act* in ways faithful to truth.

As parents of four kids, my wife and I are big fans of Natasha's previous books. As someone who has spent the last two decades studying worldviews and culture, trying to convince Christians to take both seriously, I'm a big fan of this one too.

*Faithfully Different* covers an incredible amount of crucial ground without cutting any corners. It's one of those rare books that is both faithful to biblical truth and honest about our cultural situation, a work of sound cultural analysis from a solid and distinctly Christian worldview. It's just so very *helpful*.

Because of this, *Faithfully Different* is a real gift to God's people. Indeed, if we are to follow Christ in this cultural moment, we'll need to know what it means to be faithful to biblical truth while being honest about our cultural situation.

So jump in, and bring others along with you. You'll be glad you did.

**John Stonestreet**, president of  
the Colson Center and coauthor of  
*A Practical Guide to Culture*





## Before You Read

I've always hated reading book introductions.

There's nothing worse than having a brand new book in your hand but feeling like you have to cross a 5,000-word hurdle to get to the good stuff. So, I'm sparing you that often-tedious step. But a brief and critically important note is in order about the intended audience for this book (don't skip this!).

*Faithfully Different* is an “in-house” discussion for those who view the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. **For purposes of this book, I'm referring to the worldview that is consistent with such a belief as a *biblical worldview*.** That's not to say that every Christian who views the Bible in this way will agree on every question about what the Bible says; there will always be interpretive differences in some areas. But there are many people who identify as Christians today while having a fundamentally different view of the very *nature* of the Bible. Though they may even use words like *inspired* or *authoritative* to describe how they see Scripture, they mean something so different that their entire worldview will be different. With that in mind, let me elaborate in order to make the intended audience even more clear.

This book is for those who

1. view the Bible as God's Word to man, rather than as a collection of writings that merely reflect man's best

understanding of God at the time when they were produced;

2. understand the inspiration of the Bible to mean that God Himself worked through humans to accurately convey eternal truths, not that biblical writers were in a more poetic sense “inspired” to write about God; and
3. consider the Bible in its entirety to be the only sufficient and authoritative source for salvation, faith, and godliness, rather than one of many collections of spiritual writings that can equally point people to God (2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 17:17).

If you’ve picked up this book but don’t share this view of the Bible, I certainly welcome you to read on! But I would expect you to disagree with large parts of what I say because our beliefs about the nature of the Bible differ so greatly.

If you seek to believe, think, and live according to a biblical world-view (as I’ve defined it here), I pray this book will give you the wisdom and encouragement to stand firm in your convictions no matter what secular pressures and cultural hostilities come your way.

PART 1

# THE NEW NORMAL







## CHAPTER 1

# Welcome to Your Place in a Worldview Minority!

*It's no longer "normal" to be  
a Christian in our culture*

In the summer of 2020, I wrote an article on my website titled “5 Ways Christians Are Getting Swept into a Secular Worldview in This Cultural Moment.”<sup>1</sup> I addressed several areas in which Christians need to be more discerning as we respond to emotionally charged cultural issues. More specifically, I pointed out that many Christians were inadvertently reacting to the social unrest of that summer in ways that were more consistent with a *secular* worldview than with a *biblical* one.

Apparently I wasn't the only one who noticed that our collective discernment was breaking under the weight of secular pressure: The article went viral and was liked and shared on social media more than 277,000 times. I received emails for weeks from readers who said they appreciated me putting into words what they had felt for a while but hadn't been able to put their finger on—Christians are often living more as an *extension* of the secular world today than as a distinct light to it.

For many believers, it was the cultural firestorm of that summer that so quickly brought to light the challenges of biblical discernment

in a secular society (for the moment, we'll define secular as irreligious, but we'll explore the meaning more deeply in chapter 2). The subject area of social justice, however, is just one of many areas in which such challenges arise. To get a feel for the other places where Christians are seeing secular pressures on faith, I asked on my author Facebook page one day, "What are some ways you're seeing Christians being influenced by the secular world around us—in what we believe, how we think, or how we live out our faith?"<sup>2</sup> More than 150 people responded with insightful and wide-ranging observations. Here are a few examples of what they had to say:

Everything has become very self-centered. "You be you" instead of be who God made you to be. "You got this" instead of God is in control. "Live your best life" instead of live to give glory to God. "You're so strong" instead of God is strong in our weakness.

I see Christians get mad when other Christians point out or expose false doctrines and teachers. Today it's believed we're supposed to accept all views—even of the Bible—and if we don't, we're supposedly breaking the commandment to love one another.

The idea of universalism, or that many roads lead up to the same summit, is causing many to loosely handle sin and other core Christian doctrines.

I see many Christians who feel no guilt for habitually continuing in their sin, and their lives look no different than the lives of nonbelievers around them.

I see an unhealthy and unbiblical level of mixing political views with theological views and Christian identity—on both sides of the aisle.

I have several friends who have adopted the world's viewpoint of sexual morality. I've been shocked by how many are comfortable with couples living together outside of

marriage or even believing we have to accept the homosexual lifestyle under the guise of being loving.

I see a lot of Christians feeling like they have to choose between the Bible and science, and science is presented as being the logical, educated choice.<sup>3</sup>

I bet you can relate to having noticed several of these things yourself and could add examples of your own. But can you also relate to this one (emphasis mine)?

*In my own life* it manifests itself as forgetting God’s promises, prayerlessness, gracelessness, impatience, cynicism, bitterness, and failing to know or understand how I’m supposed to respond in the tough or unexpected moments.

I loved this person’s humility in being the one person who applied the question to *themselves*. It’s easy to take note of what we see happening around us, but if we’re honest, most of us can also see that our own faith has been impacted in various ways by shifting cultural pressures. *This isn’t a challenge unique to all those “other” Christians—it’s a challenge for all of us.*

With that in mind, I took this commenter’s lead and started a separate Facebook post to ask how people have seen our secular culture impact their *own* spiritual lives. Responses like these poured in:

I find it more challenging to witness to others and to speak up and defend my own faith and the faith of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I now fear not just rejection or ridicule but retaliation.

I think sometimes I get affected by atheists questioning miracles (especially the resurrection). Our culture places so much emphasis on believing that the only things that are “real” are things you can prove scientifically. Sometimes I can start to doubt if God is real because I can’t see and touch Him.

I let the secular culture that glorifies personal autonomy isolate me and others.

I'm lowering my standards for what media I consume. I just tell myself it's too hard to find something to watch that meets my moral standards, which is an excuse to enjoy things I probably shouldn't.

I don't get as excited during the worship of my Savior as I do during a sports event.

I share all these comments because they exemplify the diversity of ways in which secular culture is influencing Christians. At first glance, some of these observations may seem to have little in common. For example, our level of passion for worship relative to our level of passion for sports appears to be a very different kind of problem than our ability to believe in miracles. But there's an underlying thread of secular influence that connects these superficially unrelated comments. Because secularism is ultimately a *worldview*—a way of seeing all of reality—it follows that its influence will reach from the seemingly mundane (our view of sports) to some of the most fundamental questions of our faith (the existence of God and the possibility of miracles). This is likely why so many people who emailed me in response to that viral article said they hadn't been able to put their finger on what they had been seeing. They had noticed the *effects* of secular influence in widely scattered examples over time, but they hadn't necessarily seen how those effects were produced by the same deeper trend: the bleeding of secularism into the worldview of Christians everywhere.

Now, in one sense, the problem of Christians believing, thinking, and living too much like the surrounding culture isn't a modern phenomenon; it's as old as the New Testament. Paul, for example, warned the early church to not be “conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2 ESV) and urged the Colossians to not be taken captive by “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition” (Colossians 2:8). Peter warned of those who were distorting Scripture “to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16) and exhorted believers

to abstain from worldly passions so others could see their good deeds and glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12). John reminded early Christians of the need to discern between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood (1 John 4:6) and to not love the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17). These are just a few of many examples found throughout the New Testament. Christians have *always* faced the challenge of remaining distinct from the world.

In another sense, however, something new *has* happened—and something new *is* happening. If you've been feeling that our culture is rapidly changing in some unique ways, you're right. And if you've been feeling that Christians are getting swept into secular ways of believing, thinking, and living today, you're right again. The purpose of this book is to help us as Christians move beyond these general senses and put our finger more precisely on what the "something" is that's happening right now so we can gain clarity on how to faithfully respond as individuals in the body of Christ. More specifically, the thesis of this book can be laid out as follows:

- If you have a biblical worldview, you're now in a *worldview minority*.
- The dominant worldview of the culture around us—a strident secularism—is fundamentally at odds with the biblical worldview.
- This opposing and often hostile secularism is putting extensive pressure on (1) what Christians *believe*, (2) the ways our beliefs inform how we *think*, and (3) how we *live out our faith*.
- We must each regain clarity on what it means to be faithfully different from today's world for (1) the health of our own relationship with the Lord and (2) our ability to effectively be salt and light to others (Matthew 5:13-16).

If you love the Lord, it's inevitable to feel the gravity of where we

are as a culture and where we seem to be headed. Indeed, many books addressing the intersection of faith and culture are, frankly, pretty depressing. But the last thing I want is for *this* book to leave you feeling like you're living under a dark cloud. We do have to confront the grim reality of where we are, but ultimately this is a book designed to help us as Christians see our current cultural context as a God-honoring *opportunity* to be faithfully different. No, that's not a switcheroo, as in telling kids, "Spinach isn't bad; it's just an 'opportunity' to eat healthy food." It's *truly* an opportunity, as we'll see in the coming chapters. In many ways, there's a great pruning happening in the church today, and it will undoubtedly result in new fruit for the glory of God.

We'll start this journey by looking at what it means that we're now in a worldview minority. In chapter 2, we'll take a closer look at the secularism that surrounds us: What, exactly, is secularism, and why does it matter so much? In chapter 3, we'll look at what makes secularism so influential in the lives of Christians. In the remainder of the book, we'll identify nine major types of secular pressures today, work to understand how they're impacting Christians, and seek to clarify what it should look like to both resist those pressures and more deliberately live out the distinctiveness of our biblical worldview.

## **Are Christians Really a Minority?**

I realize that many people find numbers to be tedious, so I hate to dive into them right away. If that's how you feel, rest assured I'm not going to provide an exhaustive analysis of studies on religious trends in America. But we do need to have a bit of a family meeting—a numerical "State of the Christian Union," if you will—as a starting point for our remaining discussions. Why? In the rest of this book, we'll see that our status as a worldview minority has far-reaching implications for the ways in which secular pressures influence us, so we need to start by establishing that we are, in fact, now a worldview minority.

Let's begin with the big picture from the most recent data. The Pew Research Center is perhaps the most widely known and cited organization for providing information on religious trends in America. Of particular interest for our current purpose are Pew's Religious Landscape

Studies, conducted in 2007 and 2014. These studies were national surveys involving more than 35,000 people who were asked dozens of questions regarding their religious identities, beliefs, and practices. Although the most recent Religious Landscape Study is now a few years old, the Pew Research Center has since collected five additional years of relevant data from political polls that ask about people's present religious affiliation (if any). Together, the data from political polls and the two Religious Landscape Studies provide important insights on religious trends in America from 2009 to 2019.<sup>4</sup>

So what does the data tell us? According to the 2019 data, 65 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians. Stop right there! Doesn't that mean this whole idea of Christians being in a "worldview minority" is patently false? It's not lost on me that many non-Christians would look at this claim with some incredulity and annoyance. *Christians are a minority? Are you kidding me? Christians are everywhere! Here we go again with the Christian persecution complex!* But this is why we need a more nuanced understanding of the data—what we're claiming and what we're not.

It's crucial to recognize that the results of this type of research are based on how a person *self-identifies*. Among, say, five people who identify as a "Christian," you could have

1. someone who says they're a Christian simply because they were raised in a Christian home (even though they no longer have an active faith in Jesus);
2. someone who generally agrees with Christian values but rejects core doctrinal tenets of Christianity, such as the resurrection;
3. someone who rejects the authority of the Bible but considers themselves a "Jesus follower";
4. someone who considers themselves a Christian but also holds various beliefs that are in significant conflict with a biblical worldview (such as reincarnation); and

5. someone who holds to the tenets of the historic Christian faith and is an active follower of Jesus.

It's easy to see that these hypothetical people could view the world quite differently despite the fact they all identify as Christians. *Self-identifications tell us little about how people actually function in culture and in their personal lives because they tell us nothing about what people believe.* That's significant because our beliefs inform our thinking, and our thinking informs how we live. What we specifically need to know, then, is how many Americans share a *biblical worldview*—not just how many Americans call themselves Christians. For this, we need to look at additional research.

### **Christians with a Biblical Worldview**

Quantifying the number of Americans who hold a biblical worldview is far more difficult than quantifying the number who self-identify as Christians. On the one hand, it's easy to omit people from the count who explicitly state they don't believe the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God or who explicitly reject the individual doctrinal beliefs that would correspond with such statements. On the other hand, it's tricky to categorize people who hold to a mixture of beliefs—some of which are biblical and some of which are not. For example, researchers have found that many Americans say they believe in the “God of the Bible” yet also believe in reincarnation. Do such people hold to a biblical worldview? Probably not, because a person who believes we have many lives to live is likely to have a very different view of reality than someone who is committed to a consistently biblical worldview (even if they say they believe in the “God of the Bible”). Other unbiblical beliefs might affect a person's overall worldview much less. Researchers have the task of determining what set of questions will best identify those who have what we might call a “functioning” biblical worldview and who at least endeavor to live accordingly.

With these complexities in mind, let's briefly look at four research studies that provide some answers. They use different approaches to arrive at their conclusions but collectively paint a similar picture.

### *Pew Research Center's Religious Typology Study*

In 2018, the Pew Research Center undertook a new and different kind of analysis on American religious beliefs, categorizing people into one of seven segments based on beliefs and behavior rather than simple self-identification. Although the research wasn't conducted in a way that allows us to quantify the percent of people committed specifically to a biblical worldview, we can infer a *maximum* percent, as follows.

Researchers found that just 39 percent of Americans are “highly religious”—seriously committed to *any* faith. The other two groups (“somewhat religious” and “nonreligious”) are characterized by beliefs that aren't consistent with a biblical worldview (for example, New Age spirituality). This implies that those with a biblical worldview are primarily a subset of the highly religious group. How big is that subset of the 39 percent? The research doesn't allow us to pinpoint a number, but we can *exclude* about 11 of the 39 percent—the “Diversely Devout” segment—who say they believe in the “God of the Bible” but also hold to a mix of clearly unbiblical beliefs. We're left knowing that those with a biblical worldview make up something less than the 29 percent of Americans who remain.

Twenty-nine percent is already a far cry from the 65 percent who self-identify as Christians, and, again, that's a *maximum* number. The actual number appears to be much lower, as the following other studies have shown.

### *American Culture and Faith Institute's Worldview Measurement Project*

In 2017, the American Culture and Faith Institute (ACFI) conducted research to specifically quantify those who have a biblical worldview. Based on an analysis of people's answers to 40 questions about spiritual beliefs and behavior, ACFI found that just 10 percent of all Americans have a biblical worldview. Millennials were less likely than other adults to have a biblical view on 19 of the 20 beliefs evaluated, with only 4 percent having a biblical worldview overall.<sup>5</sup>

### *Arizona Christian University's American Worldview Inventory*

The American Worldview Inventory is an annual survey based on 51 worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application. As done in the ACFI study, researchers categorize respondents' worldviews based on a combination of belief and behavior factors. In 2020, they found that only 6 percent of all American adults have a biblical worldview. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, the number drops to 2 percent.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps even more shockingly, researchers found that just 21 percent of *those attending evangelical Protestant churches* have a biblical worldview—with that number dropping to only 8 percent in mainline Protestant churches. Don't let the significance of that pass you by! The biblical worldview isn't just shrinking in American culture at large, *but also within the church*.

### *Barna Research*

Barna Research has tracked the trends in American beliefs that make up a biblical worldview since 1995. For research purposes, they consider a person to have a biblical worldview if they agree that

- absolute moral truth exists;
- the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches;
- Satan is a real being or force, not merely symbolic;
- a person cannot earn their way into heaven by trying to be good or doing good works;
- Jesus lived a sinless life on earth; and
- God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.

This is a pretty broad definition. In fact, when I first read it, I thought it was far *too* broad—excluding some essential and more specific

Christian beliefs like “Jesus was raised from the dead.” But even using this broad definition, Barna found that only 17 percent of Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly hold to a biblical worldview.<sup>7</sup> To be clear, that’s not 17 percent of all Americans or even 17 percent of all Christians. That’s 17 percent of Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly! Once again, we see that people with a biblical worldview are hard to find today—even in churches.

So let’s summarize what we can make of the available data. Estimates of the percent of Americans committed to a biblical worldview range from 6 percent (from the Barna research) to a maximum of 29 percent (from the Pew research), with a significant generational gap noted between millennials and older adults. Keep in mind that the Pew research wasn’t attempting to specifically quantify those with a biblical worldview, so the 29 percent was only an inferred maximum based on what they *did* measure. This means the more direct estimates of 6 percent from the Barna research and 10 percent from the ACFI research are likely to be much closer to the true picture.

The big takeaway? Those with a biblical worldview are not only a minority in America, but a small minority. Furthermore, the American Worldview Inventory and Barna Research both show that those with a biblical worldview are a small minority *even among Christians*. Yes, seven of ten people may say they’re a Christian, but that in no way reflects the relative rarity of the biblical worldview in America today.

### **But Is This Anything New?**

If the picture we just drew were the same picture that had always existed in our country, there wouldn’t be much to talk about in this book. Those with a biblical worldview would already be accustomed to navigating culture as a worldview minority and would already be fully aware of all that such navigation entailed. But that’s not the case. The picture *has* changed, in four major ways.

First, it’s estimated that the percentage of American adults holding a biblical worldview has declined by *half* over the past 25 years.<sup>8</sup> Most

people reading this book can remember life 25 years ago. If you're old enough, think for a moment about that time in your life. It probably doesn't seem *that* far back. But the percent of people in America with a biblical worldview was twice as high then as it is now. That's a swift and sharp decline. And it's one that has every appearance of continuing, given the widening belief gap research shows between generations. Historically, there's always been somewhat of a gap in religiosity between younger and older generations, but researchers say that millennials and their predecessors differ more now than they have during the past seven decades.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the percentage of Americans who self-identify as Christian—regardless of whether they actually have a biblical worldview—has dropped substantially in just the last decade. Remember the Pew Research Center data showing that about 65 percent of Americans identify as Christians today? That number was 77 percent only 12 years ago, and a drop has occurred in almost every Christian denomination.<sup>10</sup> Even if many of those who stopped identifying as a Christian over the last decade never held a biblical worldview to begin with, it says a lot that they're now consciously choosing to distance themselves from even the Christian label. The mainstream cultural view of Christianity has become negative so quickly that those who may have loosely identified as a Christian in the past are no longer willing to do so. That's not necessarily a bad thing—it's forcing people to more consciously consider what they actually believe—but it is a trend that's contributing to the rapidly changing picture of Christianity in America.

Third, those who no longer identify as Christians are overwhelmingly now identifying as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.” Meanwhile, the percentage of Americans who identify with non-Christian *religions* has remained virtually unchanged over the last decade. This is important to know because it shows we're not seeing a significant conversion of Christians to other theistic religions that might share some fundamental worldview characteristics.<sup>11</sup> If that were the case, the apparent differences between Christians and non-Christians in culture might be less striking. But instead, we're seeing people adopt worldviews that inherently share very little in common with biblical Christianity. And

the percent of Americans holding these worldviews has grown from 17 to 26 percent in just the last decade.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, this growth is not unique to any particular demographic group. It's a widespread trend seen among whites, blacks, Hispanics, men, women, geographic areas, and educational attainment. A full 40 percent of millennials now identify as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular."

Finally, many of those who are abandoning Christianity are now *also* abandoning Christian values—a simultaneous rejection that hasn't always been the case. To be sure, we can't with any accuracy look back at American history and claim that we were always bound together by a steadfast commitment to the core doctrines of Christianity. But we can say that for many years we were bound together by values rooted in the Judeo-Christian worldview on which America was founded. Though people have increasingly discarded the doctrinal specifics of Christianity over time, the societal result hasn't always been as obvious as it is today because people generally continued to hold values *consistent* with Christianity (for example, the importance of the family unit, the nature of marriage, and the value of human life). But in more recent years, secular society has started discarding the long hangover of Christian *values* as well. Christianity no longer looks like a contemporary cousin to the mainstream worldview. Today it's more like a distant ancestor who no longer shares recognizable traits.

Francis Schaeffer described this turning point in his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*:

Christianity is no longer providing the consensus for our society. And Christianity is no longer providing the consensus upon which our law is based. That is not to say that the United States ever was a "Christian nation" in the sense that all or most of our citizens were Christians, nor in the sense that the nation, its laws, and social life were ever a full and complete expression of Christian truth. There is no golden age in the past which we can idealize—whether it is early America, the Reformation, or the early church. But until recent decades something did exist which can rightly be called a Christian consensus or ethos which gave

a distinctive shape to Western society and to the United States in a definite way. Now that consensus is all but gone, and the freedoms that it brought are being destroyed before our eyes. We are at a time when humanism is coming to its natural conclusion in morals, in values, and in law. All that society has today are relativistic values based upon statistical averages, or the arbitrary decisions of those who hold legal and political power.<sup>13</sup>

*Schaeffer wrote this in 1984.* As we saw earlier in this chapter, the percentage of those with a biblical worldview has decreased by at least 50 percent since then! The increasing rejection of Christian values isn't new—Schaeffer's words could easily have been penned today—but that rejection has snowballed in the era of the internet and social media. And, as you've surely noticed, it's not a passive rejection. It's an outright hostility that views long-held Christian values as archaic at best, morally grotesque at worst.

So is our position as a worldview minority anything new today? Yes—in significant ways. The percentage of Americans holding to an explicitly biblical worldview is quickly declining, as is the percentage of Americans identifying as Christian even in name. Those who no longer identify as Christian are overwhelmingly adopting worldviews that inherently share very little in common with Christianity. And mainstream society is now rejecting the core Christian values that Americans have shared for hundreds of years.

There's no doubt about it: It's no longer normal to be a Christian with a biblical worldview in America.

### **What I'm Not Saying**

There are a few concerns both Christians and non-Christians sometimes raise in response to any talk of Christianity “declining” in America. It's worth a moment, therefore, to explicitly state what I'm *not* claiming in response to all this data or in this book more generally.

First, I'm not suggesting that Jesus said following Him would *ever* be the norm in this world. The truth is quite literally the opposite. In John 15:18-25, Jesus bluntly tells us:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

It’s obvious from Jesus’s own words that we should never expect to live in a culture where it’s standard for people to have a biblical worldview. The question we need to answer isn’t, “How do we create a culture where it’s more normal to be a Christian?” but rather, “How can we best be faithful to our calling in a world where it will *never* be normal to be a Christian—and in a culture where it’s becoming less and less so?”

Second, I’m not suggesting that the church’s survival depends on humans alone, as if we’re one misstep away from Christianity being wiped off the map. Again, looking to Jesus’s words, we’re told that the gates of hell will not overcome His church (Matthew 16:18). The body of Christ will never die, no matter how grim things look in a given place at a given time. That doesn’t mean, however, that what we do doesn’t matter. If that were the case, Jesus wouldn’t have instructed us to share the gospel, as in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Nor would He have preached about the importance of being salt and light in a decaying and dark world (Matthew 5:13-16). Passages like these *assume* we’re to be actively engaged with the culture around us. In God’s sovereignty, the outcome is assured, but we’re called to be part of the process.

Third, I’m not equating being in a worldview minority with being persecuted—at least not right now. There are many places in today’s world where Christians are being persecuted in ways we cannot even fathom in America. According to Open Doors USA, in just the last year,

- more than 340 million Christians were living in places where they experienced high levels of persecution;
- 4,761 Christians were killed for their faith;
- 4,488 churches and other Christian buildings were attacked; and
- 4,277 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned.<sup>14</sup>

Being in a worldview minority in America doesn't have implications right now that are anything like these. Anti-Christian discrimination and hostility? Absolutely. We'll talk about those kinds of issues throughout this book. But it must be stated up front that these challenges pale in comparison to what our brothers and sisters in Christ are facing around the globe. We should all be in prayer for the persecuted church.

Though I'm not saying any of these three things, I *am* saying that those who hold to a biblical worldview are now a shrinking minority in a secular culture, and that fact has significant (and often unrealized) implications for what it means to be faithful today. We need to regain clarity on how to respond, both for the sake of our own relationship with the Lord and for our ability to be a witness to others.

Part of regaining clarity requires that we more fully understand the secular worldview that surrounds us. To that subject we now turn: What, exactly, is secularism, and why does it matter so much?

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION**

1. What are some ways you see Christians being influenced by our secular culture—in what we believe, how we think, or how we live out our faith?
2. How have you seen the pressures of secular culture impact your own spiritual life?
3. Did it surprise you to learn how few people have a biblical worldview today? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think so few Christians have a biblical worldview relative to the number of people who identify as Christian? What, if anything, do you think would lead to more self-identified Christians having a biblical worldview?