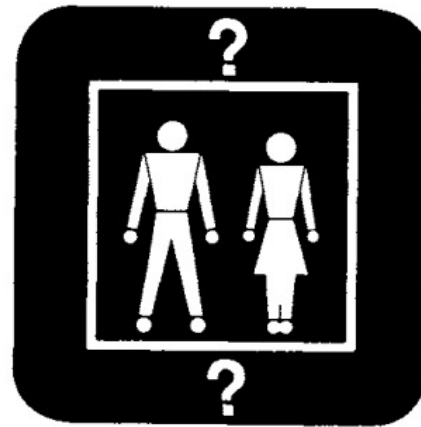


Lesson 4-2: Perception — Discernment



Romans 12:21
Hebrews 5:13-14
Philippians 1:9-11

Most of the pain in our lives is self-induced. Every day we bypass wonderful things that God wants to give us for our pleasure and for our good. Every day we take hold of horrible things that Satan wants to give us for our pain and for our destruction. The main reason we make stupid decisions to spurn what God offers and to grab what Satan offers is that we lack discernment.

The enemy is a master of illusion; he knows how to make evil things look beautiful. We fall for his enticements because we have not cultivated the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Without discernment—the ability to make wise distinctions and decisions—our spiritual defeat is inevitable.

Do not be overcome by evil ... (Rom. 12:21)

Do not be overcome by evil ... (Rom. 12:21)

"Do not be overcome" is a present passive imperative of the verb *nikao* with the negative *me*. In Greek, when a negative is used with a present imperative, it is a command to stop doing something that you are doing. These believers in Rome were being conquered by evil.

The preposition *hupo*, translated here "by," means "under the control of." There are several words for "evil," but the word used here, *kakos*, refers to something rotten to the core, harmful, malignant, but something which may look very, very good. The Romans were being deceived by appearances. They were thinking of some evil things as good. But Paul orders them by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop being conquered by this rotten cancer.

ISAIAH 5:20-21-

WHAT WAS
ISAIAH'S
REBUKE?

HOW CAN A
PERSON GET TO
THAT LEVEL?



Christianity is weak today because most Christians think that evil is simply sin, and because they think that, they are waging a war that has already been won and totally ignoring the war that is still in progress. Sin is only one manifestation of evil. The war against sin was won at the cross, where judgment for every sin that had ever been or would ever be committed was poured out on Jesus Christ. No one will ever be judged for sins.

But evil has other manifestations, the most often ignored of which is human good. The human good produced by believers is the wood, hay and stubble that will be burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). The human good produced by unbelievers is the deeds judged at the Great White Throne. Apart from faith in Christ, none will measure up to the righteousness of God, and therefore their deeds will condemn them (Jude 14-15; Rev. 20:11-15).



“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

~C. S. LEWIS



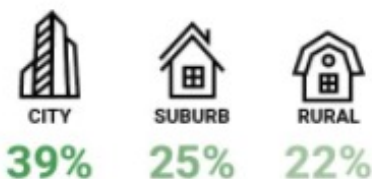
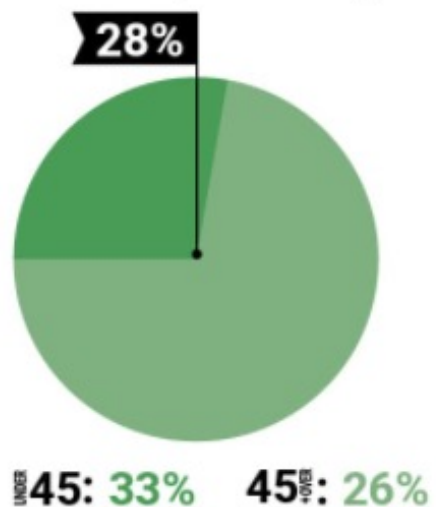
Here are a few notable findings among practicing Christians:

- 61% agree with ideas rooted in New Spirituality.
- 54% resonate with postmodernist views.
- 36% accept ideas associated with Marxism.
- 29% believe ideas based on secularism.

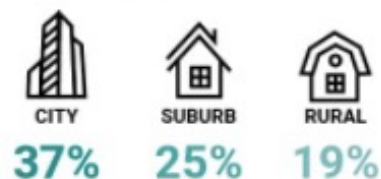
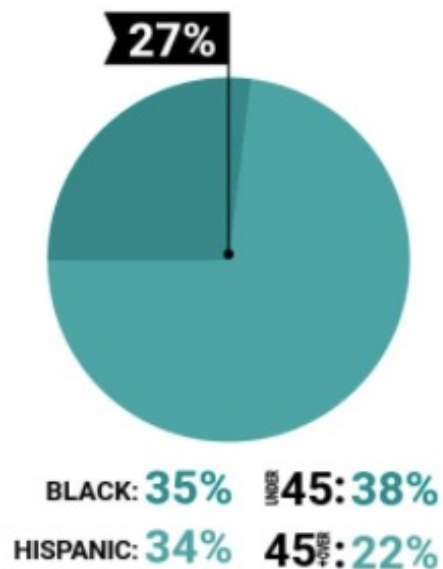
NEW SPIRITUALITY

(% among practicing Christians who strongly agree)

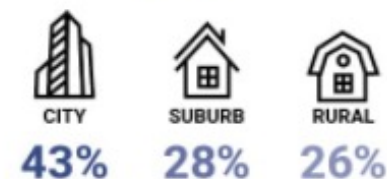
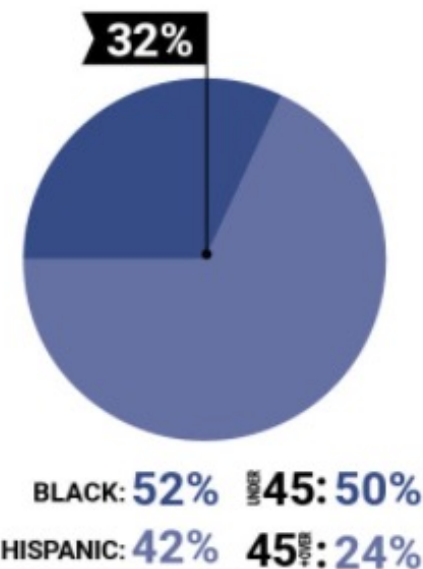
All people pray to the same
god or spirit, no matter
what name they use for
that spiritual being



Meaning and purpose
come from becoming
one with all that is



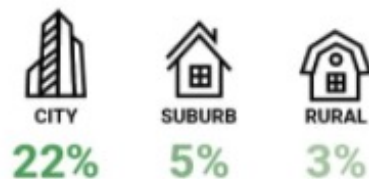
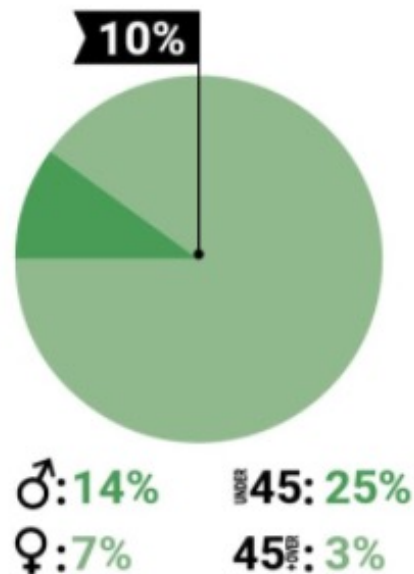
If you do good, you will
receive good. If you do bad,
you will receive bad



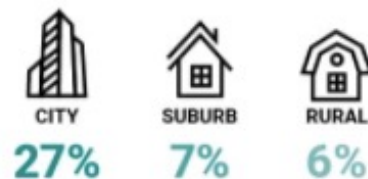
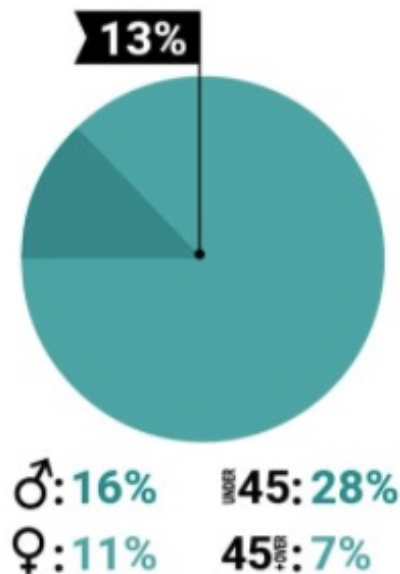
SECULARISM

(% among practicing Christians who strongly agree)

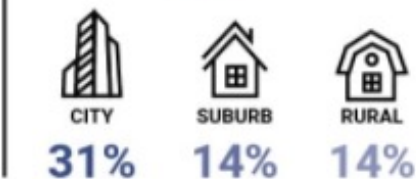
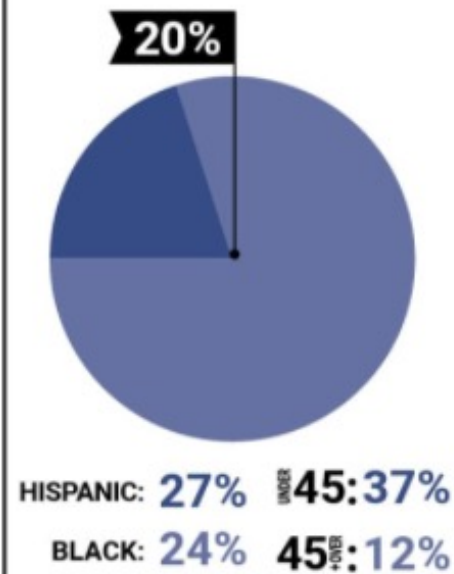
A belief has to be proven by science to know it is true



A person's life is valuable only if society sees it as valuable



Meaning and purpose come from working hard to earn as much as possible so you can make the most of life



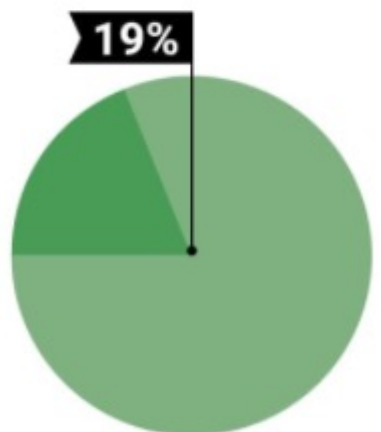
Barna

POSTMODERNISM

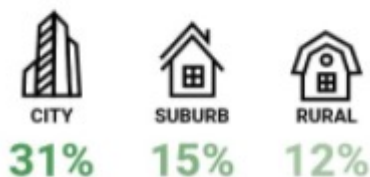
(% among practicing Christians who strongly agree)

Barna

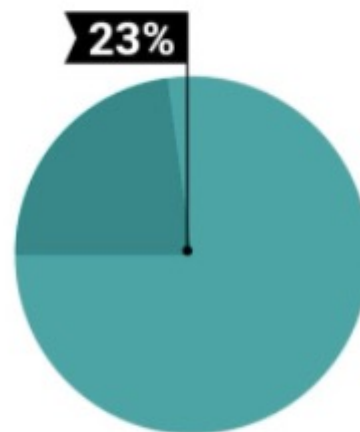
No one can know for certain what meaning and purpose there is to life



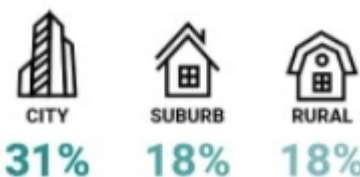
♂: 22% UNDER 45: 32%
♀: 16% 45+: 13%



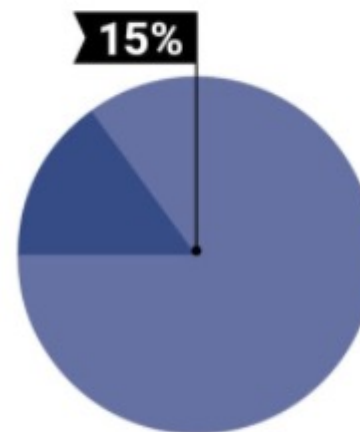
What is morally right or wrong depends on what an individual believes



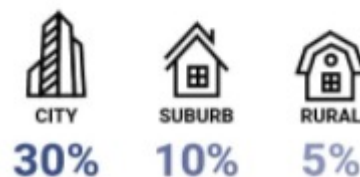
🎓: 31% UNDER 45: 37%
HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS 45+: 16%
🎓: 21%
COLLEGE GRADUATE



If your beliefs offend someone or hurt their feelings, it is wrong



BLACK: 22% UNDER 45: 29%
HISPANIC: 17% 45+: 8%
WHITE: 13%



Paul had a solution for the evil in these defeated believers' lives. Instead of being conquered, Paul says, "overcome." He uses *alla*, the strongest conjunction of contrast in the Greek language, with the present active imperative of *nikao*. He is saying, "In total and complete contrast to your being conquered, you choose to stand up and keep on conquering evil."

How are they going to do that? There is only one way evil can ever be conquered—with good. The phrase translated "with good" is *en to agatho*, "in the good" or "in the sphere of good." *Agathos* is one of two Greek words for "good;" it means absolute good, intrinsic good. Paul is talking about divine good, that which can be produced only by God.

Active discernment is a product of this balance of the Word and the Spirit in our souls. Wisdom, which comes only from the Word, is insight into the true nature of things and the ability to know what action to take. But knowing what to do is never enough—we need courage, and the kind of courage we need comes only from the Holy Spirit, the *Paraklete*, the Encourager.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solidfood is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb. 5:13-14)

He who partakes of milk is unskilled—he lacks experience—in the Word of righteousness. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 to study to show ourselves approved unto God. The only way we can be approved is through our study and application of the Word, but if we are lacking, unskilled, unable to apply the Word, then we are what the author here calls "babes," *nepios*.

Nepios does not refer to physical infants. Homer used the word to describe grown men who were childish and infantile in their thinking—heroes who came home from battle and then could not handle life. The *nepios* in Homer's writings were military heroes who had the inspirational courage to stand firm on the field of battle, but who lacked the moral courage to stand in the day-to-day grind of normal life. The author is saying here that the believer who has had time to get to spiritual maturity, yet who is still feeding on milk, is childish, infantile, lacking in the perseverance that is the hallmark of moral courage.

In contrast to the *nepios* are the *teleios*, the people who have arrived at the goal or objective, in this case spiritual maturity. The solid food of the Word, the advanced doctrine, is for the mature. These people have discernment, but not by accident—they have sweat it out in the gymnasium of the soul.

"Practice" is the Greek *hexis*, which means "a habit resulting from consistent, perpetual discipline." Discipline produces habits. Good habits are just as easy to establish as bad habits. They come the same way; they come through repetition of decisions. Bad decisions, repeated over and over, lead to bad practice. Bad practice leads to bad habits. Bad habits lead to bad character.

Krino means "to judge;" *dia* means "between." They have the ability to judge between good and evil.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment ... (Phil. 1:9)

Paul's prayer for the Philippian believers begins with *hina*, "that," which introduces a purpose clause. His prayer has a purpose, "that your love may abound." The love here is *agape*, the unconditional love that can be produced by no one but God. Every reference to *agape* in the Scriptures is a reference to the power, the dynamic, of the Spirit of God.

Agape in Scripture always has a two-fold connotation for man. In Matthew 22:37-39, we are given two commandments: to love God and to love others as ourselves. Our love for God is personal love, love based on the virtue of the one loved. God is worthy of our love. Love for others is impersonal love, based on the virtue of the one loving. The highest expression of the love of God operating in our lives is when we love those who are absolutely unlovable. But it is impossible to love others if we do not love God and if we have not learned to love and accept ourselves based on God's love for us.

