

## Students' views of the Bible

How do devout students at Christian colleges view the Bible?

The students were asked “what is your view of the Bible?” and were presented with a randomized list of 12 phrases. For each phrase they had the option to say strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

There were two phrases they commonly believed described the Bible. Ninety two percent agreed or strongly agreed that the phrase “the Bible is the authoritative word of God” is in keeping with their view of the Bible. It was also 92 percent that agreed or strongly agreed that the phrase “The Bible should be understood within its historic context and culture” is in keeping with their view of the Bible.

There were six additional phrases that had 60 to 70 percent of the students agree or strongly agree with them:

The Bible should be read as different kinds of literature

The Bible is inerrant--it has no error in it

The Bible is in exactly the form God wants it to be in

The Bible is without error in all that it affirms

The Bible is infallible

The Bible can be interpreted in more than one way

The other five phrases had small amounts of students agree or strongly agree with them.

Beyond these general patterns in the students preferences for different phrases, there are a couple of particular findings worth noting. First, these 4000 plus students have great confidence in the authority of the Bible. While 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Bible is the authoritative word of God—in fact 70 percent strongly agreed—only 8 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they don't know what to think about the Bible.

Also, these students have a nuanced understanding of the Bible as a source of truth. 70 percent of them agreed or strongly agreed that the Bible can be interpreted in more than one way while 69 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the Bible is infallible. They are quite comfortable with an understanding of the Bible as an infallible source of insight that speaks in different ways to different people or in different situations.

In sum, then, students at Christian colleges in the United States embrace the Bible as being the authoritative word of God that should be understood within its historic context and culture and they are quite confident in their views of the Bible. These students also have a nuanced understanding of the Bible: in their view it is not a simple book nor a fallible one.

### Data Collection

In the spring of 2013, students at 13 Christian universities from across the United States were invited to complete a half-hour on-line survey that asked about their spiritual background, spiritual lifestyles, scripture engagement, love of and relation to God, love of others, and their Christian identity.

4,210 traditional-age full-time students participated. Responses to the survey were weighted for proportional representativity of gender and year in school.

## Christian College Students' Views of the Bible (percentages)

