

Very few people trust poll results any more, and that skepticism should apply even to non-political polls. In fact, the most suspicious polls results I've read lately came from the conservative Christian Ligonier Ministries, Inc. in partnership with the Southern Baptist Convention's Lifeway Research. They recently publicized their third "State of Theology" survey, which was also done in 2014 and 2016, with the ominous preface that "The stakes of this poll are not simply matters of life and death. The stakes are matters of eternal life and eternal death."

The 34-question survey included topics such as the Trinity and the identity of Jesus, abortion and homosexuality, church attendance and the validity of other religions. Their conclusion? The "survey reveals deep confusion about the Bible's teaching, not only among Americans as a whole, but also among evangelicals."

The survey asked people whether they agreed or disagreed strongly or somewhat, or weren't sure, about a series of statements. Two examples:

- "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God." Among Evangelicals, 78 percent agreed. Among all Americans, 72 percent agreed. Oops. This qualifies as a heresy, since orthodox Christian theology believes that Jesus was not created, but always present with the Father and Holy Spirit.

- "Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation." About 69 percent of all responds disagreed. The survey folks sounded the heresy buzzer again. Any sin, no matter how small, incurs the wrath of God, says Ligonier Ministries.

Regarding the first statement, I can't criticize the theology asserted by Ligonier, but as a journalist, I know that the statement as posed could not help but evoke theologically incorrect responses. Most self-identified



El Paso FishNet
by Randy Limbird

Christians hear the first part — "Jesus is the first and greatest" — and automatically begin nodding their heads and don't notice that the key word is "created."

As far as the second statement, I don't know where to begin. I've read enough theology to understand the argument that all sin incurs God's wrath, but that only makes sense if you have some comprehension of the holiness of God and the nature of sin. The average person reads that statement as saying that even a person who commits a single "small" sin in his or her life is going to hell. Then he thinks about Jesus rescuing the adulterous woman from the stone-wielding Pharisees and telling her "I do not condemn you, either."

I'm sure the modern-day Pharisees who pride themselves on this "State of Theology" survey can explain how that all makes sense. They are so sure of themselves that they bemoan the "deep confusion" of others' biblical knowledge.

But theology isn't about giving "right" answers on a survey. Theology is about trying to understand God and our relationship to Him. The person who finds these survey questions odd and even obnoxious might be much further along the path of truth than those who pose such statements and stand in judgment over the responses.

Randy Limbird is editor of El Paso Scene. Comments? Send to randy@epscene.com

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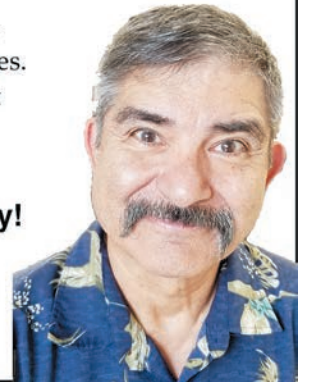
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