

U.S. Christians: Where's the Love?

Jesus prayed in John 17 that the world would know His followers by their love. Yet nearly half of evangelicals recently polled in America cite a lack of love as one of the primary contributions U.S. Christians have made to society.

Some 48 percent listed a lack of love for others, as well as violence, hatred, bigotry and intolerance as Christians' greatest negative contributions, according to a nationwide survey of American adults released Monday by The Barna Group. By comparison, only about 25 percent of the nation listed those same items as the most negative.

The difference reflected the survey's findings that evangelicals are even more likely than many other Americans to acknowledge the faults of believers. They were "the single, most critical subgroup of all," according to the report, and least likely of all respondents to say they were unable to identify any negative contributions by Christians.

Still, among all Americans, one in five identified violence or hatred incited in the name of Jesus Christ as negative contributions Christians have made to American society in recent years. These were most likely to be mentioned by people associated with non-Christian faiths (35 percent), yet evangelicals cited them too, following closely at 31 percent.

The opposition of Christians to gay marriage was more important among adults age 25 or younger, who were twice as likely as other Americans to say it was the largest negative contribution.

The belief that Christianity has not made any positive contributions to U.S. society whatsoever was noted by 11 percent of adults, and 25 percent said they could not recall

any positive contribution made by Christians in recent years.

Yet as a whole, Americans' view of Christianity is not altogether bleak. Many still believe the Christian faith has made positive contributions to U.S. society during the past few years. One of the most frequently listed was aiding the poor or underprivileged people, mentioned by 19 percent of those surveyed. Adults under age 25 were more likely to cite such service (34 percent).

By comparison, only 11 percent of evangelicals said the same and were instead more likely to list efforts related to evangelism or advancing belief in God or Jesus Christ as positive contributions. A quarter of evangelicals cited evangelism, but only 16 percent of Americans overall agreed.

Shaping or protecting the values and morals of the nation was listed by only 14 percent of Americans as a positive contribution Christians have made.

The Ventura, Barna Group asked respondents to provide their own answers to an open-ended question—meaning the 1,000 adults surveyed were not prompted with a list of possibilities but were asked to provide answers off the top of their head.