



## **Session Two: IS JESUS WOKE? WHAT ABOUT US?**

**Wokeism: America's fastest growing religion.**

### **The Genesis of a Secular Religion**

Let's begin with a question: If someone is screaming at you, "REPENT!" are they 1) an evangelical street preacher or 2) a left-wing activist? How about the crowd outside the Netflix Center in Los Angeles last year. They were protesting the release of Dave Chapelle's comedy special, *The Closer*, in which he criticized transgender activism. Nearby was a counterprotest: a single Dave Chapelle fan holding up a sign that read, "WE LIKE DAVE."

Several transgender activists rushed the Dave Chapelle fan. One tore the sign from his hand and ripped it to shreds. Another got in his face and shouted, "You need to repent!" Sounds religious to me!

Similarly, in July of 2022, things got heated at a student protest on the grounds of University College London. The school had decided no longer to use an LGBTQ charity that had monitored their diversity compliance. One of the protesters shouted, "If you don't reinstate them, you are going to hell." Sounds like fire-and-brimstone religion to me!

There's debate about whether Wokeism is a religion. Some say that it can't be a religion unless it believes in the supernatural. And clearly, Wokeism is secular. But, as the old saying goes, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it may well be a duck."

### **WHERE DID IT ALL START?**

If you want to dig deeper, I recommend the Vox online piece: [A history of "wokeness"](#). "Stay woke" was slang in the African American community. Jamaican social activist, Marcus Garvey, used it as a rallying call in 1923: "Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa!" It was put to song in 1931, when nine African American black teenagers were arrested in Arkansas for allegedly raping two white women. Blues singer, Lead Belly, warned the Scottsboro Boys: "Best stay woke, keep your eyes open." Lead Belly's song was also a warning to black kids to be alert to racial dangers in white America. After

the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, “stay woke” became a byword of Black Lives Matter activists: mostly, stay woke for instances of police brutality against blacks.

According to the *Vox* article, “woke” has evolved into a single word summation of leftist political ideology, centered on everything from Critical Race Theory to LGBTQ+ rights. Yet, *woke* is a bipartisan word. It was used by the left as shorthand for progressive ideas, and more recently by the right as a label to denigrate leftist policies.

### **A Warning:**

*Woke* is too often a verbal grenade to lob at others in our culture wars. That’s why, if you follow Twitter and other social media as I do, you discover that progressives are distancing themselves from the word *woke* even as conservatives are ratcheting up their use of it. So, I want to warn Evangelicals to be careful. Not everyone to the Left of you is woke—especially traditional leftists like Bill Maher of HBO’s *Real Time*. He’s been unrelenting in his criticism of Wokeism, particularly its “cancel culture” assault on the freedom of speech.

As Christians, we follow the One who called himself *The Truth*. We should not falsely label those whose views or choices we don’t like. We ought to be awake ourselves when it comes to words we use in the presence of those who are sensitive to what they perceive as intolerant or judgmental. *Woke* is a word that increasingly polarizes. As Christians, we want to build bridges across divides, and not walls that further separate us from those we want to reach for Jesus Christ.

### **And Yet...**

While we recognize the danger of using the word, we can’t ignore that Wokeism has become the new religion of America. If the U.S. Supreme Court has defined Secular Humanism as a religion, Wokeism is too. It is increasingly the religion of the political left, Academia, Corporate America, culture influencers, and a lot of folks who’ve abandoned churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. I would say that it is now the predominate replacement religion in most of the Western World.

I believe it was birthed in the war rooms of hell, and is a clear and present danger to our Faith, our next generation loved ones, and their future. Yet, followers of Christ have been called to spiritual warfare. We are destined to win it through our invincible King Jesus! However, as Sun Tzu wrote in his classic book, *The Art of War*, the first rule of warfare is to know your enemy. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:11, “[So that] Satan may not take advantage of us, we are not unaware of his schemes.” So let’s

explore what I believe is the fastest growing religion in the West: Wokeism.

## **WOKEISM AS A RELIGION**

German philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche, may have infamously said that God is dead, but he also gave a good warning about the danger of replacement religions. He said that humans are innately religious. If they abandon the old supernatural religions, they will invariably invent secular replacements. Nietzsche warned that those secular religions would take on all the worst aspects of the old ones: high priests who determine what constitutes orthodoxy, rebels labeled as heretics and infidels, inquisitions, holy wars, excommunication, and even martyrdom for those who don't toe the line. Ironically, one of Nietzsche's most ardent followers, Adolf Hitler, did exactly that when he turned Nazism into a state religion. So did Lenin and Stalin when they morphed Marxism into their state religion.

### **Wokeism: the Newest Replacement Religion**

Cultural philosopher, Mark Funk, wrote in an October 20, 2020 online essay, [WOKEISM – THE NEW RELIGION OF THE WEST](#), "...the rise of secular humanism in the in the past 70-years created a religion-shaped hole in our culture. Secularism...failed to offer a robust philosophy of meaning and purpose, nor did it provide any moral framework on how to act...Alternatively, wokeism has developed its own view of reality with its own set of values and narratives. From the ashes of secular humanism, a new civil religion rises."

Like all the old religions, Wokeism offers its set of **beliefs**: what is good, righteous, and socially just; what is evil, what is sin, what behaviors are taboo, and what words are profane. It defines **the Elect**: those who have been "born again" or "awakened" to the new and right way of thinking and living. It has its **High Priests** who create and maintain woke orthodoxy. Wokeism labels **the Sinners**: those who don't abide by the new rules. It keeps a list of **heretics** and **infidels**: those who don't hold to the orthodoxy of Wokeism. It even has a form of **excommunication** called "cancel culture." It conducts its **inquisitions**, and even **engages in high tech burnings at the stake** by killing a heretic's persona, reputation, and career. Certainly Wokeism, in its most militant forms, engages in **holy wars** to cleanse society of all its inequities.

Wokeism understands what every other religion has figured out: if you want to win the world, you have to get your converts while they're still young. Disciple them before they are teens and you have them for life. That's why Wokeism is working overtime in our public schools, teaching its doctrines to kids as young as preschoolers. That's why it's prominent in

the social media they consume, shows up in cartoons on *Nickelodeon TV* and movies produced by *Disney* and *Pixar*. Like a Trojan Horse, Wokeism is even invading too many Christian churches and Jewish synagogues.

And here's another fascinating parallel between the old religions and Wokeism. When the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Italian astronomer, Galileo Galilei, presented scientific fact that the earth revolved around the sun, he was declared a heretic by the Church. The old religion wouldn't allow science to contradict its false beliefs. In the same way, the high priests of Wokeism won't allow scientific or historical facts to interfere with its views on CRT, gender, sexuality, abortion, the family, economics, or politics.

Even the tearing down of statues, or erasing images of past historical characters, ironically mirrors the iconoclasts of the past who threw icons out of Greek churches, or radical Protestant Reformers who shattered stain glass windows in cathedrals and broke down statues of Mary and the Saints. There are so many ways that Wokeism mirrors past religions.

## **THE KEY DOCTRINES OF WOKEISM**

If Wokeism had something like an *Apostles Creed*, what would be its most basic beliefs? There are many, but allow me to list five from my studies.

**1) Social Justice comes from tearing down all oppressive power structures**—the main one being **white patriarchal systems**. White privilege must be eradicated. Whites must recognize and confess the advantages they have received at the expense of people of color. If they don't, it's proof that they are racists. Eradicating that sin involves sensitivity training—from preschool to the corporate boardroom. It also means that white males especially should take a "back seat" when it comes to affirmative action that promotes marginalized people: ethnic minorities, women, gays, lesbians, and transgendered folk.

Wokeism also seeks to dismantle patriarchal systems. In its view, the most privileged people in our systemically racist systems are white, heterosexual males. The traditional views of marriage and family are innately patriarchal, and dangerous. New definitions of marriage, family, gender, and sexuality are required to diminish the power and status of cisgendered white men. If you doubt the systematic dismantling of manhood, spend a few nights watching television sitcoms, advertisements, or Netflix movies. The social consequences of these redefinitions are devastating: one-third of U.S. children are being raised by single moms, and 20% by their grandparents. Tonight 24.7 million kids will go to bed in a home without their biological father.

**2. Equity trumps Equality.** Though these two words are often used interchangeably, they are vastly different. Equality refers to *fairness*,

but equity to *sameness*. Equality means equal *opportunity*, but equity means equal *outcomes*. Wokeism argues that our oppressive systems have stacked the decks against marginalized people. Therefore, the “privileged” need to forego their advantages until affirmative action levels the playing field. Certainly there is some truth to the idea of equity. It’s hard to pull yourself up by the bootstraps if you have no boots. And, too often people who are born on third base think they hit a triple. But the downside of this equity doctrine is the creation of a victimization culture; a negative fixation on everything that’s wrong instead of celebrating our progress; personhood being defined by race, gender, and sexuality; people not advancing based on merit; and the demise of a Puritan Work Ethic that built our American Dream.

**3. Truth is Fluid and Subjective.** In **Pre-Modern times**, most people believed that truth came *from above*, revealed by their God or gods and set down in their holy books. In **the Modern Age**, truth came *from outside yourself*. It no longer depended on revelation from above. Natural law provided truth, as did scientific investigation and empirical data. In the **Postmodern Era**, truth comes from *within you*. It is subjective and fluid. You are the final arbiter of what is real. In the **Digital Age** truth comes from our *social media devices*. Reality is shaped by algorithms, clicks, likes, and the number of followers. Who needs a fact checker when you have Google, Twitter, or an online culture influencer? When we all get our factoids from a plethora of echo chambers, it’s no wonder we live in alternate universes of reality. And, as a result, we’ve become a nation of polarized tribes.

One of the Cardinal Sins of this new religion is to make others feel unsafe by saying anything that disagrees with their reality. Recently a Hamline University adjunct professor showed a Medieval painting depicting the Prophet Mohammed. Even though she warned students beforehand and the Council on American-Muslim Relations later said she hadn’t been Islamophobic, the University caved in to a handful of offended Muslim students and fired the professor. Hamline officials released a statement right out of the Bible of Wokeism when they said their desire to create “safe spaces” for their students was more important than academic freedom. Make someone feel unsafe by challenging their version of reality, and you will be accused of hate speech or some phobia. Be prepared to be excommunicated or “burned at the stake” by cancel culture.

**4. Intrinsic guilt or innocence of individuals is based on their group identity rather than individual actions.** This is in contrast to biblical theology where each individual stands before God, and is accountable

for his/her/their actions. No one is worthy or unworthy based solely on race, tribe, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, pedigree, or privilege. Each individual is uniquely created in the image of God, and answers to God alone. Christians find their identity in Christ alone, their salvation in his finished work alone, and their eternal destiny set by him alone. Society will be transformed when individuals are spiritually transformed and become the salt and light that changes everything.

- 5. Wokeism is a religion lacking grace or forgiveness.** As Mark Funk says, "While it provides rituals of penance ('check your privilege') and piety (kneeling during the anthem or posting black squares), what it never offers is forgiveness. It does demand that you toe the line, and one misstep can cancel you forever. Put up the wrong slide, offend the wrong students at Hamline University, and you are immediately terminated. Refuse to bake a cake for an LGBTQ wedding, and the woke inquisition will hound you all the way to the Supreme Court and beyond. Let someone uncover something foolish you did 50 years ago, and the Twitter lynch mob will demand your banishment. Even sins committed by our national heroes 200 years ago gets statues torn down and names erased from public buildings. There is no grace or forgiveness in Wokeism. Pity those who have been attracted to its call of social justice and compassion for the marginalized, only to discover that it is a heartless and unforgiving religion.

### **OUR BIBLICAL HOPE**

1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We have a certain hope because it comes from God above and is written down in Scriptures. It covers God's gameplan for literally every area of life, from gender and sexuality to economics and politics. So, here's the question: Was Jesus woke? Daniel Dowd, a Democratic candidate for Texas Attorney General, asked on Twitter, "Would Jesus be declared 'woke' by conservatives if he came to America now instead of 2,000 years ago?" His answer was, "Yes, he would." My answer is, "Absolutely not." Here's a short list of why Jesus wasn't woke:

1. Jesus said, "Love your enemies." [Mt. 5:44] That flies in the face of cancel culture.
2. "Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you." [Col. 3:13] Wokeism doesn't have a category for forgiving others. It's an endless cycle of victims being victims, and oppressors (real or imagined) doing penance.
3. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." [Gal. 3:28] In Wokeism, our identity is in our

race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ancestry, privileges, or rank. Wokeism divides, but Christ unites.

4. "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Mk. 12:3] In Wokeism there is not clear definition of love. Love is fluid and subjective. In Jesus, love is clearly defined as obedience to God and self-sacrifice for others.
5. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." [Jn. 14:6] Wokeism says that there is no objective truth, no right reality for everyone; and no one who can tell you what to believe, what choices you should make, or how you are to behave. We don't know whether conservatives would call Jesus "woke," but we do know that many progressives would call him a homophobe, transphobe, Islamophobe, and hater.
6. "You are not your own, you were bought with a price." [1 Cor. 6:20] In a striking contrast, Wokeism says, "My body, my choice."
7. We are called to lay down our lives for others. [1Jn. 3:11-24] Abortion, in the guise of reproductive health, says unborn babies should lay down their lives for their mothers.
8. Jesus calls us to go to unsafe places in order to bring the gospel truth [Mt. 28:18-20], but Wokeism demands safe places where its followers don't have to be disturbed by facts that contradict.

I could go on, but at least this is a starter list. Why don't you add to it.

### **REASONABLE & GRACIOUS ANSWERS TO THOSE WHO ASK**

So, how do we fulfill St. Peter's command that we give reasons for the hope we have, and do so in a way that is gracious, practical, and relevant?

1. **Be 'woke' ourselves, in the best and most biblical way.** Jesus says to the dead church in Sardis, "Wake up and strengthen what remains [of your lazy faith]." [Rev. 3:2] He says to his disciples, "...stay awake at all times, that you may have strength [in the terrible days ahead]" [Luke 21:36] St. Paul wrote to the Church, "...the hour has come for you to wake from your sleep..." [Rom. 13:11] We need to wake up to what's happening around us. We need to wake up to the fact that we are losing our next generation loved ones to Wokeism. We need to wake up from our slumber and put on the armor of God to fight this spiritual warfare until Jesus comes to take us home.
2. **We can't succumb to a kind of "wokephobia."** When we fear, we start labeling people. We get angry. We want to throw in the towel. But we have truth on our side, and good reasons for a certain hope. St. Paul wrote, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds." [2 Cor. 10:4]
3. **Don't focus on fighting Wokeism as a whole. Avoid using the word *woke*.** Instead, learn the woke dogma, and come up with biblical

truths, scientific data, historical facts, and other logical reasons that show the deficiencies of each one.

- 4. Know what you believe.** God said in Hosea 4:6, “My people die for the lack of knowledge.” Treasury officials don’t learn to spot counterfeit bills by looking at forgeries, but by studying real bills. We will spot counterfeit dogmas by knowing what the Bible says is real.
- 5. Listen carefully before you respond to those captivated by today’s Woke dogmas.** Ask questions rather than giving quick answers. “How does that work?” Quietly and humbly give them alternate scientific data, and then ask them what they think about it. When they share their views, ask them, “How has that worked so far?” Seek dialogue rather than argument. Don’t feel the pressure to fix them. Or to close the deal in one conversation. Don’t burn bridges to future conversations. Remember, there is a Holy Spirit and you are not Him. Your job is to give reasons for your hope to anyone who asks, and God’s task is to do the saving. So relax, and enjoy the dialogue.
- 6. As much as possible, familiarize yourself with some of the cultural influencers who are promoting today’s thoughts.** Watch movies and other media to see the wokeisms embedded in them. Staying current on the culture will give you added credibility with your children and grandkids. But, even if you aren’t culturally hip, remember the words of St. Peter: “Love covers a multitude of sins.” [1 Pet. 4:8] If you genuinely show love toward those who disagree with you, it will go a long way to keeping the dialogues going.
- 7. Remember, the endgame is to lead them to Jesus and his grace and forgiveness.** This is the trump card of our Faith. They won’t find those things in Wokeism or anywhere else other than the gospel. Ultimately, only Jesus can change people. Only he can “heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captives, give sight to the blind, and set at liberty them that are bruised.” [Luke 4:18] And only those transformed by his grace, and are his sheep, will ever do what Wokeism promises: offer the kind of social justice that feeds the hungry, gives drink to the thirsty, takes in the stranger, clothes the naked, visits the sick, and cares for the prisoner. [Mt. 25:35&36].

*A talk given by Dr. Bob Petterson, Founder and President of Legacy Imperative in the “Sharing Faith in a ‘Woke’ Culture” series to Covenant Church of Naples, Florida, January 18, 2023. All rights copyrighted and reserved by The Legacy Imperative Inc. Please go to the Legacy Imperative You Tube Channel to see the videos from this class, put up within five days of its live presentation. Also visit [www.legacyimperative.org](http://www.legacyimperative.org) for additional discipling information and tools.*