

Woke Theology

We frequently hear the term “woke” in current discussions. Campuses, corporations, and even some churches are described as being woke. What does the term mean? How are these ideas influencing society? Is there any connection to ESG mandates and stakeholder capitalism? And how should Christians respond to the influence of wokeness?

Definition of the Term

The term means that one is “awake” to the true nature of the world at a time when so many in society are asleep. In his book on *Christianity and Wokeness*, Owen Strachan explains that “wokeness occurs when one embraces the system of thought called critical race theory. CRT teaches that all societal life is structured along racial power dynamics.”

According to this view, race is a “social construct,” not biologically based, and merely exists in our imagination. This is one place where there might be some agreement between wokeness and the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are “one race.” Some translations, for example, for Acts 17:26 refer to all humans as “one blood.” Another verse would be Galatians 3:28 which says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

I have found that woke theology often surfaces in the non-Christian world as a substitute religion. Woke theology also surfaces in some churches that are legitimately concerned about injustice. They want to be relevant to the cultural dialogue and thus adopt wokeness.

These terms are sometimes misused, which is why Strachan also devotes a section on explaining what wokeness is *not*. Here are just five statements of the fifteen he discusses:

- Wanting societal harmony across backgrounds does not make you woke.
- Seeing massive failings in American and Western history, sustained patterns of racist thought, does not make you woke.
- Doing everything you can and know to do to build bonds with people different from you in various ways does not make you woke.
- Praying for greater diversity in your church through saving of fellow sinners does not make you woke.
- Wanting greater justice in the world doesn't make you woke.

In this article we will be looking at various aspects of woke theology. What is the ideology? How does it relate to critical race theory? What about corporations that have adopted a woke ideology? And how can we as Christians respond to this current cultural trend?

Woke Ideology

Wokeness includes the ideas of critical race theory and antiracism but is broader than just these ideas about race and racial justice. It also includes other social, legal, and even environmental concerns. These ideas were first developed and promoted on university campuses but have made their way into government, corporations, and nearly every part of society.

It is most visible through the actions of people who call themselves "social justice warriors." Critics might describe them as "virtue-signaling liberals" or merely call them "the woke." Whatever name you give to these groups, they have been successful in influencing nearly every institution in America and much of the Western world.

They use inflamed rhetoric and what one commentator calls "*ex-cathedra* incantations of pseudo-values so absurd that only a

few years ago it would have seemed like they must be kidding.” That’s a fancy way of saying that you can’t believe people are completely serious when they are saying crazy things about race, gender, and science.

Much of this began on university campuses across the nation. Professors promoted ideas about cultural transformation that influenced the young minds who became the future opinion-forming elite of today. These ideas were reinforced because of a liberal media forming a feed-back loop between a leftist academy and a liberal establishment media.

This is an important principle to understand. In the past, we used to hear parents and others argue that the nutty ideas in the heads of college students would fade away as they had to earn a living and deal with the realities of the world of business. What happened was the fact that these college graduates found previous graduates in some of these corporations who were woke soul mates. The woke ideas on campus often became the foundational ideas in business and government. The media continued to reinforce those crazy woke ideas.

In her book, *Awake: Not Woke*, Noelle Mering explains how many in this emerging generation do not believe they are defined as being in the image of God but instead are called to fight evil in society. They are merely one entity in a group identity rather than someone made in the image and likeness of God. They aren’t praised or criticized by their actions and attitudes. Instead, they are elevated or condemned based on their group, their racial background, or their gender. They are not only being indoctrinated by critical theory on race but also by critical theory on sex and gender. And obedience to these ideas is achieved through thought and speech control.

Critical Race Theory

One aspect of wokeness is critical race theory. Critical

theory began at the University of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research, which came to be known as the "Frankfurt School." The Frankfurt scholars fled to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York in 1934 to escape the Nazis.

Critical theory traces all social injustice to inequities in power that are based on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. In classical Marxism, the focus was on class, with the assumption that the working class would rise up against the capitalist oppressors. By contrast, critical theory is a form of cultural Marxism that seeks a radical transformation of society by uprooting present social authorities. Cultural Marxism retains basic Marxist assumptions but advocated a "long march through the institutions," to quote a leading thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

You are either in power or out of power. If you are in power, you are automatically discredited. If you are underprivileged, you are immune from criticism. The underprivileged can make demands, but they need not make arguments, since the whole system, including basic rationality, is rigged against them. This also means that the claims of critical race theory are unfalsifiable.

At its core, critical race theory is impractical. James Lindsay asks you to imagine you own a small tailor shop where you must assist each customer individually. Two people enter your store: one is white, and the other is black. If you choose to serve the black person first, it shows you are racist because you don't trust a black person in the store unsupervised. If you choose to serve the white person first, it shows you are racist because you value white people over black people.

How should we respond to these claims? First, the Bible teaches that truth exists and can be discerned (Proverbs 30:5, John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16). Racial bias may be a problem, but the real impediment to proper biblical interpretation is our

sin (John 3:19-20). Proponents of the woke agenda reject rational arguments and censor contrary ideas about race and society.

Christians are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:30). We are to “destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God” because we are to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Second is the issue of grace. According to their view, members of an “oppressor” race will never really be forgiven because they will always be part of that race. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we are guilty because we are sinful (Romans 3:23, 6:23) not because of our racial status. We cannot earn salvation by good works because salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are redeemed through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-24).

Woke Corporations

Corporations that have gone woke have been increasingly involved in politics. Here are just a few examples from the last year.

When the Georgia legislature debated and then passed voter integrity laws, the CEOs of several corporations took to the media to express their displeasure. For example, the CEO of Coca-Cola complained the voting law was oppressive, which then brought attention to the fact that the company was doing business in China with oppressive human rights violations. The CEO of Delta Airlines complained about voter IDs as other critics were reminding them that you couldn’t get on a Delta flight without showing a form of ID. But if these Georgia laws were supposedly an attempt at voter suppression, they failed since the number of voters in the latest election set records.

Many of these companies seem to be reevaluating their past actions. They can see the downward financial trajectory of

past woke companies. The common phrase “get woke, go broke” seems to be true.

They also have noticed how members of Congress have responded. Senator Rick Scott wrote an open letter to “Woke Corporate America,” saying that he hoped they were having fun with their virtue signaling and the attempts to one-up each other. But he reminded them they destroyed working people’s jobs and destroyed some small businesses.

Although there are some members in Congress who want to pressure corporations to be less woke, there are other significant pressures on these companies to be more woke. This comes from the enforcing of ESG standards. The “E” stands for environmental concerns. What is the company doing to address the threat of climate change by lowering carbon emissions? The “S” stands for social and looks at the company’s relationship with stakeholders (often called stakeholder capitalism). The “G” stands for governance and desires diversity on the board of directors and corporate transparency.

While many of the ESG goals are admirable, recent examples show how it has been used as a political tool against anyone who dissents. A senior HSBC banker was canceled merely because he correctly observed that some of the climate change rhetoric was shrill and unsubstantiated.

Recently Tesla was removed from the S&P 500 ESG Index, even though they are the largest producer of electric cars and a few months ago had the fourth largest weighting in the index. Could it be that this change had more to do with the words and actions of Elon Musk than anything at Tesla?

How Should We Respond?

We are living in a time when we can be canceled for something we say or even for our lack of enthusiasm for a particular policy or piece of legislation. That is why Rod Dreher warns

us in his book, *Live Not by Lies*, of a coming “soft totalitarianism.” The old, hard totalitarianism came from the state (Germany, Russia) and was dedicated to the eradication of Christianity. This new totalitarianism usually comes from the Left in society but is also dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.

The soft totalitarianism of today demands allegiance to a set of progressive beliefs. Compliance is forced less by the state than by elites who form public opinion, and by private corporations that control our lives through technology. Citizens won’t be taken away in handcuffs by the state, but their lives will be devastated by Leftist elites that will do what they can to destroy their lives.

Dissenters from the woke party line find their businesses, careers, and reputations destroyed. They are pushed out of the public square, stigmatized, canceled, and demonized as racists, sexists, and homophobes.

His book is full of stories from Christians who endured hard totalitarianism and provide us with models for how to address this more insidious form of soft totalitarianism. Often this is coming from business and the media.

What is a biblical perspective on race and gender? Christians and churches are facing persecution because many of these woke ideas are contrary to Scripture. Nevertheless, many of these woke ideas are making their way into the pulpits and Sunday School classes of many churches.

Woke religion rejects the salvation of Christ and supplants it with a utopian view that true salvation can be found in environmental activism, racial activism, and stakeholder capitalism. We can applaud young people looking to make the world a better place, but they have put their allegiance into a worldview contrary to biblical principles.

Woke faith at its core is atheistic and denies God and Christ.

Much of it is rooted in a Marxist view of the world. Second, it also replaces the biblical idea of sin (Romans 3:23) with salvation through environmental activism and racial struggle. Third, it is a utopian vision that assumes we can create “heaven on Earth” without Christ.

If we want to address real social problems in our society, we need to come back to biblical principles. Many of the successful social movements in the last two centuries (abolition, suffrage, civil rights) rested on a biblical foundation. We don’t need woke theology to bring salt and light to our fallen world.

Additional Reading

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Wokeness*, Point of View booklet, 2022.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Critical Race Theory*, Point of View booklet, 2021.

Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, New York: Sentinel, 2020.

Noelle Mering, *Awake: Not Woke, A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2021.

Vivek Ramaswamy, *Woke, Inc.*, New York: Center Street, 2021.

Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel and the Way to Stop It*, Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021.

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Probe Survey 2020 Report 7:

American Views on Morals, Politics and Social Justice in 2020

Steve Cable discusses Probe's survey findings on these topics. He reveals that most Born Again Protestants are not looking to the Bible for help in moral choices and do not think they should let their Christian faith impact their political positions.

Continuing our series examining the results from Probe's [2020 survey on American religious beliefs and behaviors](#), we will consider three topics that are important to any society:

1. What most influences your **moral choices**? Our survey shows that among adults under 40, less than half of those claiming to be Born Again Protestants{1} look to biblical teachings as their primary resource for moral choices. Even among the minority group who look to the Bible, less than half of them would apply a biblical view of monogamous behavior to their choices regarding sex outside of marriage.
2. Do you mix your **religious views with your political views**? Almost two thirds of Born Again Protestants under 40 agree that one should not let your religious faith impact your political positions. As a Christian, we are to take every thought captive in obedience to Christ{2} who is the source of real truth. Every position we take in every area of life should be informed by our faith in Christ.
3. Where do you learn how to bring about **justice across our society**? While our government and educational leaders are pushing schools to take action and teach principles of justice without even telling the parents, over two thirds of younger adult Americans across all religious backgrounds believe that parents should be the primary source in

teaching ways to stand for justice in our society.

If you have a society where 1) moral questions are answered by popular opinion rather than the Bible, 2) religious faith has no place in informing one's political stances, and 3) social justice training is left to the state, you are in danger of becoming a totalitarian state where all thinking is controlled for the benefit of the government or some other power bloc within your society. In an alternative society where 1) moral guidance is provided by consulting biblical teaching, 2) one can bring their religion's teaching into the domain of political discourse, and 3) your thinking on social justice is informed by your religious beliefs, you are in danger of having a democracy where everyone is allowed to develop and express their opinion.

Let's examine our survey results in more detail to see where American adults stand on these topics.

Making Moral Choices

Our first question deals with where people go for guidance in making moral choices, as laid out below:

When you are faced with a personal moral choice, which one of the following statements best describes how you will most likely decide what to do?

1. Do what makes the most people happy.
2. Do what your family or friends would expect you to do.
3. Do what you believe most people would do under similar circumstances.
4. Do what biblical principles teach.
5. Do what seems right to me at the time.
6. Do what will produce the best outcome for yourself.
7. Other

For our analysis, we combined answers 1, 2 and 3 as answers where people are looking to see what other people think.

Across all Americans ages 18 through 55, almost four in twenty (20%) people selected one of those three answers^{3}. However, those 40 and over were less likely to select one of those three answers, at only about three in twenty (15%). Those under age 40 saw closer to five in twenty (23%) select one of those three.

Let's look more closely at respondents from ages 18 through 39. Key parts of the results are summarized in the table below.

Source of Moral Decisions	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
What other people think	15%	24%	29%	20%
What seems right to me	27%	40%	40%	58%
Sum of first two sources	42%	64%	69%	78%
Biblical principles	47%	22%	12%	3%

First consider Born Again Protestants; we see that almost half (47%) look to biblical principles for guidance. That result is somewhat encouraging although possibly misleading, as we will explore below. The encouragement is tempered by the fact over half of them are not primarily looking at biblical principles for moral guidance. This includes over four out of ten (42%) who look to others or to what seems best to them.

The Unaffiliated^{4} group are clearly not aligned with evangelical Christian values, with less than three out of 100 (2.7%) looking to biblical principles for guidance. Almost eight in ten (78%) look to others or to what seems best to them.

It is not surprising to most that the Unaffiliated would answer this question differently than Born Again Protestants.

What about other Christians who might look to the Bible for moral guidance. As Evangelicals, we often think these other Christians are presenting Jesus as an example for moral living rather than as the one and only source for redemption through His sacrifice. But, for Other Protestants and Catholics, we find two thirds (64%/69%) of them saying they look to others or to what seems best to them for their moral compass. In contrast, Other Protestants show just over one in five (22%) looking to biblical principles, while Catholics are around one in ten (12%)

Do Born Again Protestants Really Do What They Say?

Almost half of Born Again Protestants say they use biblical principles to make moral choices. With this survey, we can see if their actions match their stated approach to moral decisions. Specifically, let's look at those who claim to use biblical principles and see if they applied those to their ideas about sexuality. Let's use two questions on which the Bible provides clear moral guidance.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly

2. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:

- a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
- b. Makes sense in today's cultural environment.
- c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
- d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God**

The Bible clearly states that fornication (sex between people who are not married to each other) is always a mistake. Thus, they should select Agree Strongly for the first question. Living with someone in a sexual relationship is also fornication. They should select answer d. for that question.

For our discussion, we will call someone who answered these two questions as shown a **Supporter of Sexual Purity**.

Now let's look at how these two questions on sexual morality relate to the answer on moral choices in the table below.

Specific Question or Combination of Questions	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant
1. Use Biblical Principles for Moral Choices	47%	22%
2. Supporter of Sexual Purity	25%	3.7%
3. Use Biblical Principles (1) and Support Sexual Purity (2)	21%	3.1%
4. % of those who Use Biblical Principles who also Support Sexual Purity (Row3/Row 1)	45%	14%
5. % of those who Support Sexual Purity who also Use Biblical Principles (Row 3/ Row 2)	85%	82%

I realize that your eyes may have glazed over when looking over this table. So, let me explain the primary result. In Row 4, we see 45% under the Born Again Protestant column. This means that less than half of the Born Again Protestants who said they used Biblical Principles in making moral choices ALSO selected the biblical position on the two questions relating to fornication. For the other Protestants it was much worse, with only one in seven (14%) selecting to Support Sexual Purity.

What do we make of this disconnect? Either those whose supported Biblical Principles picked areas where they chose not to apply Biblical Principles OR those who supported

Biblical Principles do not understand what the Bible says about sexual purity. Both of those choices are a disconcerting view of the fractured worldviews held by many Born Again Protestants.

We also note in row 5, that almost all of those who select to Support Sexual Purity also said they would use Biblical Principles in making moral choices. This figure seems to show that those who do not use Biblical Principles are much more consistent in rejecting biblical morality.

Religion and Politics

The second question deals with how we relate our religious thinking and our political thinking. The question asked was:

Just as the government should not be involved in the internal workings of churches, Christians should not let their faith impact their position on how government functions. Responses from Agree Strongly to **Disagree Strongly**.

A person's understanding of religious principles should drive their thinking on any political questions which intersect with a religious principle. We should expect not only Christians but people of every religion to disagree strongly with this statement. For a genuine Christian, their faith in Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Bible are the foundation for all of their beliefs. As Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)." If we want to apply truth to our position on how government functions, we must look to the source of real truth, Jesus.

Christians can genuinely disagree about the best way to achieve certain objectives. For example, we know Jesus calls us to show concern for the poor and for widows and orphans. However, we may disagree on the best way to carry this out within the structure of our society. But any political approach we choose to support should not contradict our underlying faith position related to the issue at hand.

We can see how people responded to this question in the table below.

Faith should not impact positions regarding government issues	Age Range	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Strongly Disagree	18	21%	6%	8%	5%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	– 39	39%	19%	23%	14%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	40 – 55	58%	23%	26%	20%

Looking at Born Again Protestants, this group is much more likely than other groups to strongly Disagree or Disagree with the statement.

Among those ages 18 to 39, we see that about one in five (21%) Strongly Disagree and close to four out of ten (39%) Disagree or Strongly Disagree. A significant number appear to realize that you cannot segregate your faith beliefs from your beliefs about how our government should operate. However, for this age group, the vast majority, almost two out of three (61%), either agree with the statement or don't know. This majority buys into the lie that their religious faith should not impact their political beliefs.

Secondly, we see a significant difference in the answers based on the age of the Born Again Protestants. For those ages 40 through 55, we find almost six out of ten (58%) disagree or strongly disagree. Younger adults have been brought up in a society that constantly warns them to leave their religious beliefs at home. Do not bring them to the public square as they are not welcome or appropriate. Those over the age of 40 are much more likely to reject this popular mantra and bring their religious beliefs into the political arena.

Of those Born Again Protestants under the age of 40 who say

that **their faith has a significant impact on their daily lives**, over two thirds (70%) of them also say **they make moral choices relying on biblical principles**. This is a consistent result, for if faith has a significant impact on your daily life, one would expect it to impact your moral choices. But at the same time, less than one third (29%) of these Born Again Protestants with faith important in their daily lives said they strongly disagreed with the statement that our faith should not impact our political positions. Clearly some combination of the news media, secular education and politicians have succeeded in misguiding Americans on this topic. **Many have bought into the false model that political positions are not moral decisions.**

Finally, let's note that significantly less than one out of ten people who are not Born Again Protestants strongly disagreed with the statement. Other Protestants and Catholics are not distinctly different than the Unaffiliated this muddled thinking.

Bringing About Social Justice

Most Americans probably want a fair and just society where law abiding citizens have fair access to opportunity and can apply themselves

toward achieving their life goals. However, there are many different ideas on how to best achieve such an objective. So, we asked this question:

Matters of social injustice like racial prejudice and bullying are best remedied by (rank from 1, most important to 5, least important):

1. Government laws and penalties
2. Churches teaching on how to live with and treat others
3. Parents overtly teaching their children how to treat others
4. Parents showing their children by example

5. School curricula focused on correct social thinking

As noted in the question, respondents were asked to rank the five responses rather than pick the best one. We did this because we felt that many people would have more than one approach they considered important.

Let's begin by considering the options that were ranked as most important. In our evaluation, we combined the two options featuring parents as one item.

First Choice	Born Again Protestant	Other Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Parental Guidance	69%	53%	66%	73%
Church Teaching	21%	19%	19%	8%
Government Laws	9%	15%	9%	11%
School curricula	1%	14%	6%	8%

As shown, parental guidance was by far the most popular choice across all religious backgrounds averaging about two thirds of the responses. Except for the Unaffiliated, church teaching was a distant second, polling about one out of five for the other religious groupings.

Let's consider the other extreme, the response selected as their least favorite choice by our respondents. Except for the Unaffiliated, the least popular option was school curricula focusing on correct social thinking. This option was selected last by about four out of ten respondents across all of the religious groups. Naturally, more than half of the Unaffiliated selected Church Teaching as their least favorite choice. For Born Again Protestants, government laws were selected as least favorite at almost the same level as school curricula.

As you can see, most Americans would say that remedying social injustice required parental involvement while school curricula was the least popular option. Thus, it is very interesting that many politicians and educators want to make the school the primary place for remedying social injustice while protecting the students from the poor examples of their parents. This may well be why that at the time this is being written that some school boards are seeing a significant change in their make up as pro-parental rights candidates are being elected.

Notes

1. Born Again Protestants affiliate with a Protestant denomination, have had an experience with Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives today, and state they will go to heaven because they confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.
2. 2 Corinthians 10:5
3. Each of the three answers accounted for about 7% of the respondents.
4. The Unaffiliated include atheists, agnostics and those who believe nothing in particular.

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Probe Live: Woke Theology

Probe Live presents “Woke Theology”

Kerby Anderson is president of Probe Ministries and host of the live nationwide Christian talk radio show “Point of View.” He addresses important questions:

- Is the social justice movement hijacking the gospel?
- What is all the fuss over Critical Race Theory? Where did that come from?
- What about White Fragility? What is that exactly?

The free booklets Kerby mentioned are available here:
probe.org/kerby-anderson-booklets/

And be sure to check out the Head & Heart Podcast about Woke Theology here: probe.org/podcasts-and-messages/head-heart-podcasts/

See previous Probe Live talks here: probe.org/probe-live-videos/