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WOKENESS: THE RELIGION OF PROGRESSIVISM

By Douglas Wilson



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Apparently being woke is a thing now. I heard yesterday that there were even some woke Calvinists out there, and the seventh angel sounded his trumpet. After that some plaster fell off the ceiling.

Let us define our terms. Being woke means that you have grokked to your complicity. Let me start over. Being woke means that you have come to realize that you (and better yet, your parents and teachers) are *guilty, guilty, guilty* of all

kinds of nefarious things, to be itemized later, and that you have resolved to *atone, atone, atone* for all your guiltitudinous privileges, and you are going to do so by trembling on the lip of being *woke, woke, woke*, and if you ever start to slip back into your somnolent white supremacy or your torpid male privilege, then you will just pinch yourself and *peddle, peddle, peddle, yes, harder, harder, harder*.

Self-salvation, in other words. Described another way, self-salvation is a maelstrom of guilt, works, envy, slavery, snobbery, and lust.

We live in a fallen world, and we are a sinful and wicked people. We are all screwed up. This means that every religion, being pitched to people in this condition, has to somehow deal with the categories of guilt and forgiveness. But there are two basic kinds of religion in the world—one predicated on grace, and all the others predicated on performance. In the former, all the glory goes to God, and the liberty goes to the forgiven sinner. In the latter, the glory, such as it is, goes to the sinner, who turns out to be god in this system, and the glory is solemnly pronounced over the chains that have been made to shine like silver, but which still rattle and clank for all that.

Those ways of salvation that are predicated on performance have to figure out a way to turn failure into fuel. This is necessary because, since we are incorrigible sinners, failure is a given. Consequently, failure becomes the energy that drives everything. And that is why modern secular forms of self-salvation are a toxic mixture of guilt, shame, and fear. By modern secular forms of self-salvation, I am referring to racial wokeness, gender wokeness, environmental wokeness, foodie wokeness, gun-control wokeness, and all the rest of it. Guilt is the raw energy for these religions,

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but it exists in the form of crude in the ground. After it has gone through the social justice refineries (which smell like nothing on earth), what we have is rage by the barrel. And *that* is what you see all around you, friends, including an honored place within the church, including places within the church *that really ought to know better*.

In short, anybody who thinks he is “woke” is actually still in his sins. What man calls woke, the apostles would call comatose. What man calls woke, a faithful gospel preacher would describe as dead and deep. “Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” ([John 9:41, ESV](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%209.41) (<https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%209.41>)).

The guilt begins as *objective guilt*, which is to say, guilt before God—true guilt. This is the real guilt that comes from the reservoir of abortion blood, the unremitting lust for porn, the pursuit of strange flesh, the contempt for parents, the all-consuming wanting that desperately pursues the *desiderata* of the flesh, the eyes, and the pride of life. Our people, our generation, our rulers, our thought leaders, our nation, are all buried under a rock pile of this guilt.

Moreover they hate the gospel, in part because they envy those who have been set free from their guilt. What do these people think of those who have been liberated? Mark this well. This is going to explain a lot for you. A prisoner chained to the wall who sees another prisoner walking away free can go in two directions. He can seek liberty himself, on the same terms that his freed brother got it (“Tell *me* the gospel! Take me with you!”), or he can resent the freedom the other has and seek ways to re-enslave him. This is the way of envy, and many choose it.

But Christ has forgiven that man for his fornication. For his envy. For his lust after mammon. For his malice and bitterness. For the abortion he pressured his girlfriend back in college to get. For his lying. All of that, cleansed. Washed clean. Gone. On the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection, God has completely squared the accounts, and that man—who manifestly does not deserve it—is walking out of this noisome place completely freed.

And so, because guilt chains you to the wall, and because all the chained slaves don’t want anybody enjoying liberty under a blue sky, they have conspired together to rob us of our liberty.

Given the fact that the gospel frees us from real sins, and the enslaved don’t like reminders of real sins anyway, what they do is cook up a host of fake sins, manufactured sins. Like the deep and grievous sin of not being “woke.” They have generated a thick fog of legalisms. You probably had some refined sugar this morning. The chicken that laid your eggs was not a happy chicken, and that goes double for the pig who supplied the bacon. Your great great-grandfather probably had sex with some of his slaves. You have almost certainly mansplained a few things, just this week. You have a handgun, *and* some ammo. You are a member of the NRA (full disclosure: I almost joined yesterday). You believe that brides should promise to obey their husbands. You believe that the market should set the price of gasoline. You, in short, are a “wretch like me,” and they want you back in their oppressive religion, one that is characterized by nothing that even resembles amazing grace.

Conservatives are not hated because they are suggesting different policy prescriptions for problems that we all acknowledge that we have. No. We are hated because we are not going along with the religion of guilt by leftist fiat. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” ([Gal. 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%205.1) (<https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%205.1>)). And the more you do *that*, the more hated you will be.

So this secularist religion that has most Americans by the throat is a works-righteousness religion, which means that all the incentives in it are designed to keep you on the hook. Your liberty, you being off the hook, exasperates them like nothing else does.

These people are woke, but they all have the wim wams. They are woke *with* the wim wams. No, that is not quite it. They just have the wim wams, and they are calling it woke.

Mind you, there is nothing wrong with *actually* being woke. I mean the real thing, the kind that Christ has always offered. But He offers a life, a life of liberty, one that denies the incentives of guilt altogether.

“Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”” ([Eph. 5:14, ESV](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%205.14) (<https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%205.14>)).

via [Doug Wilson](https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/woke-wim-wams.html) (<https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/woke-wim-wams.html>)



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