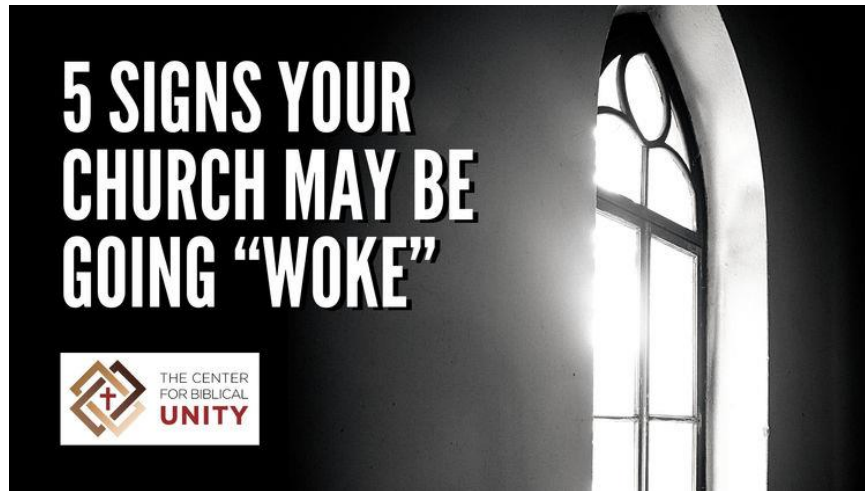


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5 Signs Your Church May be Going “Woke”

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For the past 3 months, I have received *many*, MANY emails from people sharing their encounters with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in their church and asking for help because they are afraid their church is going “woke.” These two notes represent the typical themes.

Since George Floyd we have had “dissecting racism” discussions from the pulpit. I watched them twice and was in tears but couldn’t figure out why. Was it that we were allowing pastors to hashtag black lives matter? Maybe that’s what was unsettling in my spirit. Was it that I heard a pastor say “silence is violent”, saying that we need to “love one another” isn’t enough, and then 10 words later saying we as white people can’t use our language to put words to their (black Americans) plight. Can you help me understand what’s going on? Is this right or is my church going “woke”?

My child’s youth pastor has subscribed to the CRT & BLM. I reached out to him and I heard nothing back. It is a hard place for parents to be.

For those unfamiliar with the term, “woke” is currently used in culture to mean, “[aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues \(especially issues of racial and social justice\)](#).” On the surface, there’s nothing wrong with being aware of injustice and oppression. After all, the Bible has a lot to say about how God’s people ought to respond to injustice.

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While being “woke” may sound like a good thing, its use by CRT advocates makes it a shorthand way of referring to the acceptance of an entire secular framework. This is deeply problematic for the Christian. Being “woke” involves performing a list of works in order to become, and stay, “woke.” Conversely, not ascribing to the “woke” ideology, even if you do believe that racism exists, usually results in being shamed or kicked out of the tribe.

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Many pastors are scrambling to explain the reality of race riots and systemic racism to their congregations. And sadly, because many pastors were caught unprepared for this crisis (because conversations about race were largely avoided), they are grabbing a hold of the nearest paradigm that seems to explain the complex dynamics of this cultural moment. This has resulted in many evangelical churches ushering in ideas related to CRT into their pulpits and small groups.

For these reasons, I thought it might be helpful to provide a short guide to help Christians discern whether or not your church is going “woke.” Here are 5 signs to look for.

1. Your pastor/leadership team describes White people as being inherently racist, or quotes prominent people who do.

The assertion that “all White people are racist” is itself a racist idea. Yet, there are a growing number of voices within Evangelicalism adopting this view.

This generally sounds like this:

- “All White people are racist.”
- “I am a racist.”
- “White people will never escape being racist.”

CRT holds to the belief that because of inherent racist systems within the fabric of America, all white people participate in racism, both willingly and unwillingly, knowingly and unknowingly. This idea of intrinsic racism is usually followed by a call to be “anti-racist,” which is a CRT term for “doing the work” to end oppression.

CRT advocates will tell you that being passive or silent about racism is not enough. In fact, silence is still racism. One must be *actively engaged in tearing down racist systems, White supremacy, and White power dynamics* in order to be considered anti-racist. This is a process that never ends because racism itself never ends. It only changes forms.

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2. Your pastor and/or leadership team promotes the idea that White people need to engage in corporate acts of lament and repentance.

A couple weeks ago, pastor and author, [Max Lucado publicly repented for the sins of White Supremacy](#). Lucado repented for his own personal sins and not the sins of his ancestors. Yet, I question the idea of coming together corporately to repent for sins I haven't actually committed. If Lucado has sinned against someone, wouldn't it be better to act according to Matt. 5:24?

So, if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

The thought that Whites hold the guilt of previous generations of racists/racism has prompted some pastors and leaders to call for a corporate repentance from what they call America's original sin—racism. One thing I believe many people miss in this idea of corporate repentance is that repentance is more than saying "I'm sorry." Merriam-Webster defines [repentance](#) this way:

1. To turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life
2. To feel regret or contrition
3. To change one's mind

Repentance involves having an understanding and acknowledgement of sin and actively turning away from it and going in a different direction.

But CRT tells people to repent, even if they haven't personally participated in racism. And since they haven't actively participated in racism, they don't know what they are turning away from. Some congregants hesitantly participate in these church-led services of lament and repentance under the assumption that what their leaders are saying must be true. Let me say this clearly, repenting for arbitrary, non-distinct sin will never lead to long lasting, impactful heart change.

If you want to study more about the subject of corporate repentance, please read Dr. Pat Sawyer and Dr. Neil Shenvi's article: [Do Whites Need Corporate Repentance for Historical Racial Sins?](#)

3. You are encouraged to read the "new canon."

There are several books being put forth as useful tools to understanding the current racial climate we find ourselves in. If your pastor or church assigns or recommends the books

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White Fragility, White Awake, How to Be an Anti-Racist, Be The Bridge, or The Color of Compromise as helpful resources to understand your participation in racism in America, then your pastor is leading your congregation into some aspect of CRT.

4. Your pastors/leadership team uses and encourages the phraseology of Black Lives Matter (BLM).

Here are two questions to consider when you see pronouncements about “black lives matter” from the pulpit:

1. *Is your pastor/leader proclaiming the truth that all Black people have equal dignity, value and worth because they are created in the image of God? If the answer to that question is a CLEAR yes, then, I would say a thoughtful Christian can support that message. If you're wondering why I say this, I am a Black woman. I do think Black lives matter.*
2. *Is your pastor or leader recommending, or even mandating, that you donate money to BLM (the organization) or attend a BLM protest? Then I would say, your church is probably going woke.*

There is a big difference between supporting all humans being created in the image of God and supporting a Marxist organization who doesn't value the Black fathers or the biblical family structure, and does not share a vision of human dignity from a biblical perspective.

5. CRT terms are used by leadership and congregants are expected to know them, believe them, and participate in culture from that mindset.

If you hear your pastor suddenly start using terms like the following, then your church is probably going woke.

1. [White Fragility](#): a posture of defensiveness, anxiety, and anger exhibited by Whites in response to discussions of race.
2. [Whiteness](#): a set of normative privileges granted to White-skinned individuals and groups which is “invisible” to those privileged by it.
3. [Racism](#): racial prejudice plus institutional power.
4. [Anti-Racism](#): Commitment to actively dismantling systems and institutions that produce racism.

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Be sure to check out Dr. Neil Shenvi's [Antiracism Glossary](#). I find his explanations of terms to be the most succinct and helpful.

The use of CRT terms in our churches can lead to confusion and an unintentional acceptance or conflation of meaning. My encouragement to all Christians, and especially pastors and leaders:

- Refrain from using non-biblical terms (terms not found in Scripture) that have been offered by the culture.
- Clearly define your terms so everyone knows what you mean.
- As much as possible, choose terms that are founded in and clearly supported with Scripture. Use references whenever possible.

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So you think your church is going woke. Now what?

Most importantly, don't panic! Churches don't need a bunch of anxious and angry parishioners running around in the name of Jesus. It's not biblical, and honestly, it just makes for more mess.

Here are some practical steps to follow:

1. Don't jump to assumptions.

Believe the best about your pastors and leaders and assume they are trying to remain faithful to the Bible until you have clear evidence to the contrary. Love is "not easily angered...does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth...always trusts, always hopes" (1 Cor. 13:5-7).

2. Ask questions and get clarity.

There's a good chance that your pastor used terms that he didn't completely understand. You can ask questions like, "I heard you use the word 'White privilege'? How would you support that idea according to Scripture?" Your pastor may be in his own learning process. Allow him the space to make mistakes.

3. Go to the source.

Don't gossip. That will harm relationships (Prov. 11:13; 16:28) and possibly bring unnecessary division. Have conversations directly with those who you believe are "going woke." The best person to offer clarity on something that was said, *is the person who actually said it.*

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4. Talk to church leadership.

After you have had the appropriate conversations, if you notice that terms and messages are still coming from a CRT perspective, bring your concerns to the leadership of your church. Because some of the tenets of CRT borrow from the Christian worldview, leaders may not be able to distinguish between what is CRT and what's not. I found that many in leadership are completely unaware of the CRT framework. Continue to believe the best about your church leadership and try to support them.

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5. Offer resources.

The conversation of race and CRT is complex and can be quite overwhelming. Help your pastor or leader by inviting them to investigate the issues further by providing solid, biblical alternatives to the CRT narrative. Here are a few to get you started:

- * [The Center for Biblical Unity](#)
- * [Dr. Neil Shenvi](#)
- * [Samuel Sey](#)
- * [Edwin Ramirez](#)
- * [Jamal Bandy](#)

As God's people, we must be able to recognize Critical Race Theory and be prepared to have conversations, as needed. Even hard conversations. Multiple times. This framework is insidious and is subtly creeping through the doors and pews of our churches. Be prepared to give a defense. Defend the faith. We should not be afraid or surprised that CRT is showing up in our churches—we should expect it. Rather, let us be prepared to give a solid defense against this secular ideology with gentleness, respect and a clear conscience (1 Pet 3:15–16).

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<https://www.centerforbiblicalunity.com/post/5-signs-your-church-may-be-going-woke>