

CONTENTS

Foreword: John M. Perkins	13
Foreword: Ligon Duncan	15
PART ONE: BE AWARE	
1 – The Church Should Already Be Woke	21
2 – How Big Is the Gospel? (Justice and the Gospel)	39
3 – We’re Family, We’re Holy	59
PART TWO: BE WILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE	
4 – Is the Church Asleep?	75
5 – Things for the Church to Lament	95
PART THREE: BE ACCOUNTABLE	
6 – Reclaiming Our Prophetic Voice	115
7 – A Vision for Change	129
PART FOUR: BE ACTIVE	
8 – The Woke Church in Action	145
9 – Seeing Through the Lens of the End	165
Acknowledgments	183
Notes	185



THE CHURCH SHOULD ALREADY BE WOKE

The Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii erupted on May 17, 2018 at 4:17 a.m. spewing lava more than a thousand feet in the air. Homes and other structures in the wake of the lava flow and the eruption's related ongoing events were destroyed. But geologists say that the volcano has been erupting almost continuously since 1983.¹ One eruption is followed by a period of calm . . . maybe another year or so of quiet that allows people to relax and forget . . . and then another eruption. Because volcanoes are formed when a tectonic plate shifts over a hot spot in the layers of earth beneath the surface, we never know exactly when or where they will erupt.

The issues of racism and injustice are like that Kilauea Volcano in a lot of ways. They form a hotbed of lava that lives just beneath the surface, and at any moment, they can explode violently—as happened in Charleston, South Carolina when Dylan Roof went into a black church and gunned down ten worshippers.

Or these issues can fuel the subtle micro-aggressions that minorities experience on a daily basis, like being ignored when they go into shops for service, or being followed because people assume they are stealing.

But the evangelical church seems to be asleep to the hotbed of tensions that threatens to overflow into communities across America. Scripture makes it clear that we are supposed to be totally awake to what is happening in our world and steadfast in our commitment to fulfill the great commandments. Jesus fulfilled the law by calling for a love of God and neighbor. Although this is supposed to be a lifestyle that characterizes all Christians, we have to be called to this over and over again as a prophetic community. In Ephesians 5:13–14, Paul says,

Everything *exposed* by the light is made visible, for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore, it is said: *Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*

When Paul talks about everything being “exposed by the light,” this doesn’t merely mean to see something that was hidden. It is deeper than that. The word for exposed means “rebuke, expose; refute, show one’s fault, implying that there is a convincing of that fault.”²

What Paul is saying is that the gospel strengthens us through the Spirit to see things in our society that others do not. We are called, as the people of God, to wake up. To see what others don’t and call it out. The church in America is not awake to the reality of what is happening in communities across this nation, and we are missing out on our calling to shine the light into these places of darkness for Christ’s glory.

CNN released an exclusive report in October 2017 titled,

“People for Sale: Where Lives Are Auctioned for \$400.”³ A team of their reporters traveled to Libya and witnessed smugglers auctioning off twelve migrant men as slaves, some for no more than \$400. This modern-day slavery sprang up in recent years when the Libyan coast guard started cracking down on refugees fleeing the country for Europe. Smugglers suddenly had a backlog of refugees on their hands and began selling them as slaves. The reporters learned of at least nine other locations in the country where these auctions were taking place.

As our family sat around the family table for dinner, we started talking about what was happening in Libya. We often discuss current events around the dinner table, assessing them through a biblical worldview. My sons came and stood up behind me as I took out my phone. We don’t usually allow phones at the dinner table, but I made an exception this time. I began showing them a video, not of atrocities, but of the reporting on the story so they could see and understand what was happening.

My eight-year-old son, Nehemiah, started crying. He said, “Who are these people?”

I said, “Son, these are our people.”

He said, “These are *our* people? Is this *today*?” He could not wrap his eight-year-old mind around it. He began to weep because he could not reconcile the idea of slavery in today’s age.

My son couldn’t believe that people of any kind would be enslaved, particularly people that looked like him. Nehemiah had never been to Libya. He had never met any of the people featured in the video that we watched, but they looked like him, and he immediately understood his connection to them. They were *his* people. And their pain, their trauma, became his pain and trauma. When I think about his emotional response, I see what should happen within the family of God whenever injustice rears its ugly head.

I'm so grateful that God saved us to be in relationship with Him. But He also bought us to be in relationship with one another. God's intent is for us to hurt with one another, to care about the suffering of one another. When I think of Nehemiah's tears, I have to wonder when such lament will come from the church body of our white brothers and sisters . . . where is the collective voice, the emotive, empathetic, impassioned cry in response to their black brothers and sisters who are suffering and experiencing trauma?

It's one thing if a stranger gets shot on the street. We feel for them; we may even pray for them. But when somebody you have a relationship with gets shot, there's a different response because of their nearness, because of connection, because of love. Our division in the church in America is rooted in disconnection from one another. And that, my Christian brothers and sisters, should not be.

When Christ returns, all of our bylaws and documents for our organizations will dissolve. We will be consumed with knowing Him and knowing one another. My urgent plea to the church is that we begin to let that future truth impact our present reality.

On one of my favorite shows, there was an interview that Oprah did with rapper and businessman Jay-Z. She asked Jay-Z for his perspective on race, and as he began to talk I found myself feeling convicted. He said that hip-hop, through its music and its culture, has had more impact on race relations than any figure or any entity other than Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement. He talked about how whites and blacks can come together in the clubs—even though they might not get together outside the club. They gather around this musical and cultural form and find solace in being able to talk about things they wouldn't normally talk about. Hip-hop helped them to start talking with one another and even to begin building relationships.

Why was I convicted by that? Because a musical, cultural form that's only about forty years old should not have more im-

THE CHURCH SHOULD ALREADY BE WOKE

pact than the church, which has existed for thousands of years. We should be the main communicator about challenges that happen in our country on race and justice. We should be the first place that people look to for answers. We should be the ones presenting a clear, viable model of the hope that lies within us.

We all have that hope, the hope that Jesus provides. Whether we are black, white, Haitian, Asian, African, or European Christians, we should have a unified voice. We're all people of the same Bible, even though we're in different locations and have different ethnicities. But we have the same blood, the same Holy Ghost, the same Word! We should already be *woke* to what is happening in our world. And we should be shouting His message about it from the mountaintops.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY WOKE?

My desire in this book is to encourage the church to utilize the mind of Christ and to be fully awake to the issues of race and injustice in this country. Pan-Africanists and Black Nationalists use the term “woke” to refer to no longer being naïve nor in mental slavery. We have borrowed the term and redeemed it to be used in the context of being awakened from deadened, sinful thinking. In fact, every believer has been awakened from sin's effects and Satan's deception (Eph. 5:14). Thus, the believer is able to be aware of sin and challenge it wherever it is.

Woke is a word commonly used by those in the black community as a term for being socially aware of issues that have systemic impact. This social awareness doesn't come from just watching the news or reading history through a traditional lens. Being woke has to do with seeing all of the issues and being able to connect cultural, socio-economic, philosophical, historical, and ethical dots. A similar term is *conscious*.

Here's how one commentator describes being woke:

To me staying woke means making sure that you're tuned into your community. That you are doing everything that you can to not only educate yourself but to bring someone else along. To ensure that we all have the same information. It's not enough to be woke on your own; you need to help someone else along to also get woke. Woke is about a state of mind.⁴

Both *conscious* and *woke* find their beginnings in the writings of William Edward Burghardt ("W. E. B.") Du Bois, the great twentieth-century father of sociology. He spoke of a *double consciousness*. Du Bois speaks of being woke in terms of the double consciousness of black people in his landmark work, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.⁵

THE CHURCH SHOULD ALREADY BE WOKE

This double consciousness that Du Bois identifies is the struggle of blacks in America. It is a struggle to emerge with a strong sense of self and dignity, while being fully aware of the perception of our people in the eyes of white America. Most African Americans have had at least two life-altering experiences that are burned into their memory—the moment they realized they were black and the moment they realized that was a problem.

Double consciousness is a reality for minorities in this country. But I would like to add a third consciousness to this conversation. This third consciousness is what being truly woke is rooted in. Being truly woke is rooted in Christ Consciousness. This is the anchor. This is the common ground. At our core, without being conscious in Christ, our souls are still in bondage and can only see things from the natural, fleshly appearance. Our Christ Consciousness gives the double consciousness depth and character. Our Christ Consciousness elevates our awareness to our responsibility to care for and love our brothers—even those who don't look like us.

However, if one is regenerated by the gospel, yet unaware of the double consciousness of African Americans and other ethnic minorities in America, one's clarity on justice and race issues will be clouded and even absent. Therefore, to be fully woke, one needs to have all three aspects of consciousness.

Being woke isn't limited to color or ethnicity or culture. It is possible for anyone to be woke. If you have a level of understanding of the double consciousness of blacks and are regenerate, you are woke. However, our dilemma is this: sin and strongholds in our thinking can impair the depths of our wokeness. I celebrate my white siblings who have grappled with and taken hold of this message. You give me hope. I was encouraged by one of these woke brothers awhile back when a young black man was shot and killed by a police officer. My friend Matt Chandler sent an email to me and a few other black pastors saying, "Yo, E, I'm sorry about what

happened. I don't know what to say. I'm brokenhearted. Love you guys." He was sensitive to how every time one of these events takes place, it re-traumatizes our communities. That's a woke brother.

I've designed the following chart to help identify how these three aspects of consciousness intersect and impact the psyche of African Americans and specifically African American Christians. It's of critical importance for the broader community to understand the triple consciousness of their black siblings. There are extremes in each area of wokeness, but where all of them intersect—at the cross of Jesus Christ—there is awesome power.

I arrived at this chart after a good number of conversations and research to help define the impact each of these perceptions has on one another and in concert with each other. Having said that, it is not my intent to color anyone with a broad stroke or to suggest that all of these markers are true for every individual in a particular category. My goal is to help the broader community understand the triple consciousness of black Christians. Anything we can do to help ourselves understand and empathize with one another will be beneficial for our witness.

The following chart is not categorically monolithic or static; there are several places of overlap in these categories. My point isn't to over-stereotype, but give the general, overarching themes and different, dominant thought patterns that are pervasive and possible in the black community.

Similarly, my friend, Brian Loritts, tackles this issue in his book *Right Color, Wrong Culture: The Type of Leader Your Organization Needs to Become Multiethnic*. In the book, he makes this statement: "Within every ethnicity there exists at least three cultural expressions."⁶ He identifies C1s as people who have fully assimilated into another culture. C3s are culturally inflexible—solidly entrenched in their own culture. And C2s are culturally flexible and adaptable without becoming ethnically ambiguous or hostile.

- I believe that the gospel changes our souls and circumstances.
- I believe that many American Christians are culturally captive to their political identities.
- I am unapologetically black and unashamedly Christian.
- I am willing to work on reconciling with whites.
- My spiritual identity is found in Jesus.
- My physical identity and features are created and valued by God.
- I don't have to become another ethnicity to be valued.
- I believe blacks need to create institutions.
- I am not color blind.
- I believe that Christian history needs to be redeemed from white revisionists.
- I fight for unity in the church.

- My sense of self is defined by how the white world perceives me.

- I see myself through the lens of the white Christian world.

- I don't think that systemic racism exists any longer.
- I believe blacks are to blame for our current condition.
- My theology has been developed solely in white spheres.
- I seek white approval for my significance, dignity, and identity.
- I measure other blacks by white cultural standards.

- I seek dignity in the black community.
- I'm more than your categories.
- I have value.
- I don't trust whites.
- I see hypocrisy in American Christianity.

Woke to White perception

Woke to Black Self-perception

Gospel Wokeness

- I believe we should just preach the gospel.
- I don't believe the gospel promotes social engagement.
- I believe the gospel, but don't believe it speaks to racism and injustice.
- I view color blindness as a virtue.

- I view most whites with suspicion.
- I believe that Christianity is the white man's religion.
- I want to be separate from all white institutions.
- I find my significance, dignity, and identity in my African heritage.
- I believe blacks need nationality beyond American citizenship.
- I am likely to be involved in black mystery religions, ideologies or black atheism

- I'm done with Evangelicalism.
- I'm disillusioned with Christianity at times.
- I want to remain Christian, but separate from whites and white Christians.
- I identify more ethically with unbelieving woke blacks than Christians.
- I am partial to black scholarship.
- I believe that Jesus was black.

FULLY EVANGELICAL

I believe that the call of God on the life of every evangelical Christian is to be woke. But today evangelicalism is hard to define. I remember entering Dallas Seminary and hearing that term and needing help. I didn't have a frame of reference for it. You can pose this question to many Christians, and you'll get differing answers. For some Christians, it may be a code word for healthy, trustworthy, biblical Christianity. For other Christians cross ethnically, it is, for the most part, very confusing.

Evangelicalism was defined for me as the covenant community of believers that hold to the historic Christian faith at its core—although we may differ on some nonessentials. Being evangelical has been used in times past by Christians to distinguish who is an orthodox Christian. Over the past few years, there's less and less clarity about what it means to be an evangelical. The term has taken on a political agenda that has become disturbing for many.

I checked out the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and was pleasantly surprised by some of the items that were on their website. The core of the evangelical faith is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The word evangelical itself comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “the good news” or the “gospel.” Evangelicals are identified by these four primary characteristics:

- Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life-long process of following Jesus
- Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts
- Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority
- Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.⁷

THE CHURCH SHOULD ALREADY BE WOKE

I fully agree with these statements and believe that the gospel is of first importance, as the apostle Paul strongly asserts:

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

(1 Cor. 15:1–3)

I believe that with all of my heart, with all of my mind, and with all of my strength. However, it was the second characteristic of evangelicalism that was especially exciting to me: activism. I longed to hear them flesh out what is meant by “expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reforms.” I wonder how and why this key tenet of evangelicalism has been left undone when the needs are huge and desperate. Many of us are regeneration-focused in a way that ignores the outworking of new life in the world. Historically, when it comes to race and justice, conservative evangelical Christianity didn’t have a theology by and large that moved them toward activism.

In the book of Titus, Paul applies regeneration to the area of comprehensive societal engagement. He lets his readers know that they need to be ready for every good work in their city (3:14). “Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works for pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.” *Pressing needs*? Pressing needs are those things that are absolutely essential and vitally necessary, indispensable. We can’t deny that Paul sees meeting pressing needs as a core Christian commitment; not a peripheral one. We do not substitute proclaiming for action;

WOKE CHURCH

and we don't proclaim and neglect action. We proclaim and engage in activism that flows from the gospel.

GOSPEL JUSTICE RESTORATION AND RECIPROCITY CYCLE

To apply this we must be awakened to the reality of implicit and explicit racism and injustice in our society. Until then, our prophetic voice on these matters will be anemic and silent. *Being woke is to be aware. Being woke is to acknowledge the truth. Being woke is to be accountable. Being woke is to be active.* This is the call of God on the church and on every believer. The remainder of this book will be arranged around these four themes. *Be Aware. Be Willing to Acknowledge. Be Accountable. Be Active.*

The following chart pictures what I refer to as the Gospel Justice Restoration and Reciprocity Cycle. This cycle is a recurring process throughout life. Understanding that is helpful for us all. It is no different than how our souls are in a constant cycle of



transformation and spiritual growth. That is: sin, hearing the Word, conviction, confession, repentance, faith, and fruits of transformation. And the cycle starts all over again.

May God's Holy Spirit open our eyes to the places where sin resides, and then provide the healing balm of the Word to stir us and move us together as a Woke Church.

Be Aware. This whole issue of justice has been a contentious one for the church historically. But there is so much that unites us as the family of God. My prayer is that these overarching truths will carry us along on our journey to becoming a Woke Church.

What should connect the church in a vital way to the issue of justice is the imperative of the Gospel. In **Chapter 2: How Big Is the Gospel? (Justice and the Gospel)**, we'll examine what the gospel encompasses. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for their fastidiousness in tithing and their woeful neglect of the more important matters of the law—justice and mercy. He lets them know that in all of their work to understand Yahweh, they have missed justice. We'll talk about the gospel and justice, justice in God's character, justice in the gospel, and justice as the character of the church.

God has called the church to be His representatives in the world . . . but not as a divided body. A Woke Church is One Church. In **Chapter 3: We're Family, We're Holy**, we'll examine what it means for the church to be a family. The apostle Paul wrote the letter to Philemon, a slave owner, to challenge him to forgive and reconcile with his escaped slave, Onesimus, based on their shared connection through Christ. The letter ends up undermining the very foundation of slavery. Where there was only a master-slave relationship before, there is now a family relationship. They are brothers in Christ. They are family, but not just any kind of family. The church is set apart to be holy in this world. We'll talk about that.

Be Willing to Acknowledge. One of the most difficult things for me to deal with is the refusal for many evangelicals to acknowledge the truths about what has happened in our country. Our history has been hard for people of color, and the church must be willing to acknowledge those hard truths if we are to move toward healing. Much of our history is shrouded in darkness because it is hard to talk about and even harder to understand from our vantage point today. In **Chapter 4: Is the Church Asleep?**, we'll address this topic by surveying the church's response to the issue of race through various periods of American history: slavery, post-slavery, the Civil Rights era, and the modern era. This is an essential part of the journey to wokeness—and to understanding the plight of our family members who are people of color.

We'll talk in **Chapter 5** about **Things for the Church to Lament**. Woke minds require sober thinking, and sober thinking leads us to lament sin's devastation. The concept of lament is not popular. We're not comfortable with it. We like to rush quickly to our praises and hallelujahs. But God's Word encourages and allows us to take time to grieve. I'll share ten things that I lament regarding where we are today as the church.

Be Accountable. Where there has been silence in the past, we now have the awesome opportunity to reclaim our roles as light and salt in our world. We need to be known for speaking the truth to one another in love so that we can deal effectively with the problems of race and injustice in the church and in the world. In doing so, we become an effective gospel community with a ferocious prophetic voice. The call to be a Woke Church requires us to reclaim our biblical identity as the people of God.

In **Chapter 6: Reclaiming Our Prophetic Voice**, we will outline seven crucial components of prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching must: contain the gospel, be centered on Jesus, be clear

on the issues, be biblically informed, be rhetorically contending, provide visionary hope, and offer clear statements of action. We will be encouraged to see the church as a prophetic community. The reader will be encouraged to no longer be silent on injustice in our culture.

Chapter 7: A Vision for Change will present the framework for how the Woke Church should think about its approach to justice. I'll suggest that we should have a three-level approach to justice: 1) Intervening Justice: the effort to tend to and meet pressing needs without which persons will not be receptive to the gospel message; 2) Preventative Justice: taking a proactive approach to issues of justice to get ahead of and stem the tide of the evils that challenge our communities; and 3) Systemic Justice: developing programmatic approaches to address systems that have historically worked against the principles of justice.

Be Active. Ephesians 5:16 says, “*making the most of the time, because the days are evil.*” The KJV says, “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” Making the most of the time, or redeeming the time, is the word *exagorazomai*, which means “to do something with intensity and urgency . . . to take full advantage of every opportunity.”⁸

At its best, this concept challenges us to maximize the opportunity for the gospel. Race, justice, and dignity are huge issues for gospel common ground. When Christians spend time arguing about what's going on in the public square and not engaging it, we miss redemptive opportunities.

One of our church planters had a basketball court in the neighborhood that was in shambles. The pastor of the church, Doug Logan, got with several churches (white and multiethnic churches), and they worked together with the city to restore the courts. City leaders were so impressed that they began to provide materials and paid their workers overtime to help with clean-up

because they were so shocked that a church cared. Because of this and many other activities, the mayor and the pastor built a viable relationship. The neighborhood was blown away and granted the pastor a street nickname: “Pastor Diddy.” He became a part of their village, and he and the church are able to engage the neighborhood with a free “hood pass.” A hood pass is when the residents and the thugs put the word out that no one is to bother the pass holder, or there will be consequences. Now Logan is the go-to guy for funerals in the neighborhood where he is able to proclaim freely the gospel and lead people to Jesus.

In this section, we’ll talk about ways the church can actively engage the issue of justice in our communities.

Chapter 8: The Woke Church in Action will suggest ten action steps that the church can engage in to bring healing and justice into our spheres. Among them is the concept of making *Imago Dei* a part of the foundational biblical and gospel education for all believers. Just as the Jerusalem Council clarified issues that were to be foundational Christian practices for Gentiles, so the Western church needs the valuing of people as created in the image of God as a key part of its teaching. We’ll discuss the Woke Church Think Tank and consider what it looks like when believers join swords to fight this battle together.

In **Chapter 9: Seeing Through the Lens of the End**, we’ll be reminded of the blessed hope that the future holds for every believer. It is impossible to talk about race and injustice without having in mind as a believer what the future holds for the church. Revelation 7:9–17 gives us a picture of what is to come. There is a revolution coming. The universal church will stand before the eternal God and praise the Son. And in that eternity, all ethnicities will be distinct yet unified because of Jesus Christ. That will be glory!

I love the church. I love the fact that we get to be a part of

THE CHURCH SHOULD ALREADY BE WOKE

the called-out Body of Christ in the world right now. Right in the middle of all that is wrong with our world. That's a privilege. But I do believe that the church should already be woke. We should already be champions for justice. We have a gospel imperative that challenges us to care for the least among us. Like my son Nehemiah, there's a part of me, deep down inside, that's almost inconsolable when I think of the great divide in the family of believers in this country. It's from that place of deep pain and struggle that I appeal to you to share this journey with me. Let's wake up, church. Let's get at it.