

## Sermon – March 27, 2022 – Cancel Culture

### Prayer

Good morning and welcome to Grace Baptist Church. Let's begin with a word of prayer.

### Introduction

I know that our sermons are usually expository where we step verse by verse through a book of the Bible, but I want to deviate a bit this morning to discuss a topic relevant to society today: Cancel Culture. In fact, I don't even have a base text from the Bible this morning but will skip around with scripture that supports the points that I make. Ultimately, I want to contrast Cancel Culture with Christian Culture. So, let's open with a quick poll.

By show of hands, who has heard of Cancel Culture? Keep them raised if you are concerned about the effects of Cancel Culture on the Christian Church. Thanks, you can put down your hands.

First, let me state that I know this could become a politically charged subject if handled improperly, but that I recognize the Church has no political party. As such, I promise to refrain from and stay away from the political angle. In fact, as we move forward, I hope that you become more concerned about the Church's perceived role in Cancel Culture than you are concerned the Church will be canceled or a particular political viewpoint is canceled.

So, before we get too far along, we must define our terms. Cancel Culture: how do we define it? For purposes of today's discussion, let's define it as follows: a form of ostracism in which someone or a group is removed from social or professional circles – whether it be online or in person – for views, opinions, statements, etc. that are contrary to the views, opinions, statements, etc. of another often without recourse or way to end the ostracism, usually with the intention that the ostracism is permanent. Those subject to Cancel Culture are referred to as Canceled.

So why should our Church be concerned with Cancel Culture? I propose that there are two main reasons. The first is fairly obvious – the possibility that the Church or its members are canceled because of a Christian viewpoint we hold. I'll admit that this was the only angle I initially considered when I decided to speak on this topic.

Our Church holds several viewpoints that are contrary to current popular opinion including the definition of marriage is a union between one man and one woman, homosexuality is wrong, sexual relations before marriage is wrong (this includes pornography as well), abortion is murder, and Jesus is the only way by which a person may be saved. This is just a sample of viewpoints contrary to popular opinion, but the list is much longer and growing day by day. Because of these views, our Church and any member who is brave enough to state them publicly are subject to being Canceled. This Canceling may very well cause Christians and the Church to lose access to platforms we use to spread the Gospel. Also, those of us with jobs outside of the home are keenly aware of the changing culture with regards to

popular opinion. I just recently finished my required 6 hours of training on unconscious biases, non-discrimination, and acceptance of others in the workplace. What is pretty clear from that training is that my Christian viewpoints regarding homosexuality, transgenderism, and family structure are not welcomed to be openly shared while I'm to accept the opposing viewpoints without protest – to violate this could result in punishment up to losing my job. These are just a couple examples of how Cancel Culture may affect the Church and its members.

But, this is not a new issue for the Church. From the beginning the Church faced opponents and obstacles. Jesus warned us in John 15:18-21:

*<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

This passage clearly shows that those who Christ has chosen out of the world, to not be of the world, will be hated – yes hated – just as Christ was hated. Further, we know the history of the early church – the martyrdom of the disciples (except John who was exiled) and the murder of the early Christians – as proof this passage is true. We've enjoyed a relatively easy Christian existence, but even that's not currently the case across the globe as there are countries even today where the Church must be underground. We should expect that the world will move to Cancel us because it hates us and perhaps we are entering a time here where we may begin to experience more resistance than we have previously.

So, that summarizes the first concern the Church should have with Cancel Culture – the possibility of being Canceled – and some examples of how that is already beginning to happen.

But I mentioned there was another angle I didn't initially consider and that is that the world thinks Christians deserve to be Canceled because we also Cancel the world. Let me state that once more – the world agrees it's ok to Cancel Christians because Christians also Cancel the world.

While studying for this sermon, I began to see articles like – and listen to this title carefully – *"Evangelicals Perfected Cancel Culture. Now It's Coming for Them"* and it was like a gut-punch. Do people really believe it is the intent of the Church to cancel them? Evangelicals *PERFECTED* Cancel Culture? Let that one sink in – we perfected it. I certainly don't believe that, but what person that believes the Church perfected Cancel Culture would ever be open to the Gospel? I began to contemplate times when portions of the Church had not acted appropriately – the Crusades and the Salem Witch Trials came to mind as times when portions of the church were involved in practices that could be seen as Canceling – nothing is more ostracizing or permanent than killing those that don't agree with you. I considered other ways the Church has Canceled people in modern times – I remember my uncle telling me of the way members of a church had asked people to not come back if they were dressed a certain way, I remember how certain churches have treated divorced people, I remember how a church pulled

their support from missionaries because they had a Bible verse on their website from a version they did not like, and I clearly remember the day one of the 'evangelists' at NC State chased a young lady across the brickyard yelling "you Jezebel, you whore" because of the shorts she was wearing – and I began to understand why the world could see the Church as an agent of Cancel Culture. Certainly those on the receiving end of each of these examples could say the Church intended to Cancel them – and the Church was in the wrong in each case. Certainly these actions didn't open the hearts of non-believers to hear and receive the Gospel.

And thus my thoughts were corrected, our focus must be less on how we are affected by Cancel Culture, but rather our focus should be on how we can be different from Cancel Culture to reach the lost among us. Along these lines, I want to contrast some of the tenants of Cancel Culture with our Christian values:

### Contrast 1: Canceling Those with Differing Viewpoints

Cancel Culture relies on ostracizing those with differing viewpoints. At its core is the belief that those with differing views should be pushed away from the group. But how is the Church to reach the lost in the world if we push away all those that don't share our viewpoints? Although we disagree with their viewpoints and will not compromise the truth that God has revealed to us, we must draw in those with differing viewpoints to earn the opportunity to present the Gospel.

Consider Jesus' own ministry. When we examine who Jesus spent the most time ministering to, it was those who were labeled as outcasts. Matthew, one of the disciples, was a tax collector which was hated by the Jewish people – yet Jesus chose him and other sinners over the Pharisees. Matthew 9:9-13

*<sup>9</sup> As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.*

*<sup>10</sup> And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*

The Pharisees looked down on the "tax collectors and sinners" – a form of Cancel Culture – yet Jesus reached out to them directly – "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Jesus drew in those outcast by the popular culture who needed to hear the good news of his coming.

Consider further the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. This woman had been Canceled also as evidenced by her drawing water at noon seemingly to avoid the others at the well. She differed quite a bit from the accepted opinions of the day – married multiple times, living with another man, a member of the Samaritan group hated by the Jews – yet Jesus chose to go to her, and the results were that <sup>39a</sup>*Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.*

In summary, instead of pushing those away with differing viewpoints like Cancel Culture, we must seek out those with differing viewpoints to present the Gospel – it is the sick that need the physician. Then we must ask ourselves “why do we not seek out those with differing viewpoints?” I submit, and to bring the discussion full circle, it’s often our fear of being Canceled. Our sin nature causes us to desire the approval of the world, even though we know the world is wrong. God knew this would be the inclination of our hearts and spoke about it through Peter in 1 Peter 3:15-17

*<sup>13</sup> Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

We’re assured to face criticism from the world as we engage with those with differing viewpoints. However, what power do they have over us? And how are we to react to push back from the world – present the hope that is in us with gentleness and respect.

## Contrast 2: Cancel Culture Commits Hypocritical Judgement

Cancel Culture relies on man’s hypocritical, self-righteous judgement of another rather than right judgement by Christians based in the Christian understanding of sin. Consider Matthew 7:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> “Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

The warning here is against the hypocritical judgment with which the world judges, not a complete prohibition against some level of discernment regarding sin by the Christian. The world judges and Cancels those it disagrees with without recognizing the sins in its own self. This is a self-righteous judgment of the perceived sins of others. This is evidenced by the anger with which it Cancels others, but is also defined by the ever changing ‘truths’ it uses to judge. These changing ‘truths’ prove the basis of judgement is not grounded in anything right by which to cast judgement – right truth is by definition unchangeable – but rather man’s flawed understanding of truth apart from God. The end result of this is what we often see today where the Canceled viewpoint is the Christian truth while the viewpoint which is incompatible with God is the accepted.

So, what is a right view of judgement from the Christian perspective? See verse 5 – once the log is removed from your own eye, you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Translation, a Christian that has been delivered from his sin is enabled to identify the sin in his brother. This is not to say that the Christian is enabled with the ultimate judgement given to God as described in 2 Thessalonians 1 that determines who is and is not “worthy of the kingdom of God” – but the Christian

possesses the unchangeable truth that informs his judgement of others to see sin in both other Christians as well and non-Christians – this is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Please don't misconstrue my statements here as there are numerous warnings regarding passing judgment throughout the Bible. What I'm trying to confer is that when we confront the world, and even other Christians, regarding their sin, we are to do it from the perspective 1) that we are a sinner too and 2) from a position of concern and love. By 'first taking the log out of our own eye', we must deal with our own sin first. Through this dealing with our own sin, and acknowledging its existence in our lives, we can then and only then approach others to humbly discuss sin. Unlike those that practice Cancel Culture who deny their own sin, Christians must acknowledge confront our own sin before we're able to confront others, and in confronting our own sins, we're able to share these experiences and address sin in a non-hypocritical way.

### Contrast 3: Those Who Are Canceled Are Forever Canceled

Modern Cancel Culture provides those that are Canceled no means of redemption. In fact, it's quite the opposite. As new reasons for Cancellation are imagined, there is no statue of limitations on how far back the world will go to discover perceived wrong-doings in the past of targeted individuals and groups.

Contrast this to the truth we have in the Gospel of Christ. 1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* The forgiveness that Cancel Culture withholds is the foundation of the Gospel message. Rather than project condemnation as the world does through Cancel Culture, we have a message of love and forgiveness available to anyone that will confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. We can proclaim that there is no sin that you've committed, no matter how bad or how long ago, that is beyond the scope of forgiveness in Christ. Further, we can also proclaim that when you stumble and sin again, as we all do, Christ will not cancel you then either. If you're here today and you've never before considered the forgiveness of sin offered through Jesus Christ, I invite you to do so today and speak with one of the elders about how this forgiveness can be applied to your life.

One area where the world misunderstands the church in the area of forgiveness is Church Discipline, and Church Discipline is often an area pointed to where the world accuses the Church of participation in Cancel Culture. First, I think we have to admit that the Church at large has misapplied Church Discipline in the past. Several of the examples given earlier testify to this fact. But, Church Discipline examined rightly is not an act of Cancellation – quite the opposite. Consider Matthew 18:15-17

*<sup>15</sup> "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."*

The focus on the passage is not to exclude the brother who has sinned, but to convince him to repent and rejoin the fellowship. The escalation of discipline is not to Cancel the brother, but to cause him to acknowledge his sin and therefore be drawn back into the body. Notice too how the majority of

discipline is handled quietly with the least number involved as possible – the point is not the same as Cancel Culture to publicly shame the brother, but to quietly move them towards repentance. Even at its extreme when the sin is taken to the Church at large, we don't ostracize the brother from church – in fact we welcome them to stay under the Church's teaching in hopes they will still repent – although we do withhold certain rights of membership such as communion. We treat them as Jesus treated the Gentile and tax collector – as an individual that needs to hear the Gospel message.

## Appeals

As we conclude, I want to reiterate the following points:

- Be concerned about Cancel Culture and its effects on the Church, but be confident in knowing the Church has survived similar struggles in the past
- Make sure that the Church looks different to the world than the rest of the world – we should be a contrast to popular Cancel Culture rather than a different version of it
- Finally, if you're here today and feel the world has Canceled you, please consider Christ and the forgiveness of sins belief in him can offer you today. I'm available, as are the other elders, to discuss the Him with you today.

## Final Prayer