

**Rooted**  
***A Greater “Cancel Culture”***  
**August 9, 2020**

Good morning everyone.

Whether you're onsite here in our auditorium, down in the café or watching online in real-time or tuning in at a later time – I think that about covers it – I'm glad you're with us.

As Shannon said, today we are continuing in our series *Rooted: Foundations of an Unshakeable Life*.

And I want to say at the very beginning that my goal in this series is to help those of us who are Christians to remain, as Paul, said, *rooted* in the person of Jesus and in what He and his very first followers (the Apostles) taught.

And just in saying those words, I have to also say that *it sounds kind of boring*.

It sounds like, "OK, kids, let's all remember to brush our teeth, eat our veggies and get plenty of sleep. Let's all remember the basics so that we can be healthy and thriving."

But the truth is that you and I are experiencing, in this very moment, a cultural upheaval and turmoil that is anything but boring.

If you pay any attention at all to what is being said about what's going on in our nation (and I do), not only is it overwhelming in volume, it's also very unsettling.

It's challenging what we think and what we believe about ...

- How things truly are
- How things ought to be
- And what we should do to get where we all want to go.

And that's not a bad thing (to be challenged) especially if you're a Christian.

And I know not everyone here or watching online is a Christian and that's great and I'm glad you feel comfortable enough to hang out with us and learn more about the way of Jesus.

But if you are a follower of Jesus, it's not a bad thing to be challenged because you should *always* be open to the possibility that you are not seeing things as God sees them ...

... which, by definition, means there are

going to be times when you are very uncomfortable intellectually and emotionally.

And that in itself is an uncomfortable thought because a lot of people – Christians – think that Christianity (and church) is primarily about being comforted and affirmed and encouraged.

We should always feel ...

- The comfort of the Holy Spirit
- The affirmation of the love of God
- And the encouragement that His purposes will ultimately be fulfilled in us and in this world.

And we *should* feel those things.

But Christianity (and church) is *also* about ...

- The *conviction* of the Holy Spirit
- The *disciplining* love of God
- And the *personal transformation* that leads to God's purposes being accomplished in us and in the world.

Jesus once said that His way of living is *narrow* compared to *broad* way of the world (which most all of us have adopted by default).

So, having those unpleasant moments where you realize that you are off the path and you need to change how you see things and how you think about things (which the Bible calls "repentance") is to be expected.

And, if you're a Christian, you always should be open to that and listening for that.

## Words of Warning

*And, yet, at the same time, you should also be aware that as you are open and listening, you could be deceived and drawn away from the basic foundation of the Gospel (or the good news) of Jesus of Nazareth.*

It's a fine line to walk to be open to the Spirit and also aware of deception, which is why, since the very beginning ...

The earliest leaders of Christianity – the Apostles – were constantly looking at the influences of their culture and trying to help followers of Jesus discern what was in line with their faith and what was not.

In fact, that was Paul's primary reason for writing the letter containing the passage which has been the foundation of our series.

He wanted Christians to have, in his words, "the full riches of complete understanding, so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."

**Therefore, he told them ...**

*Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

*Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)*

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on ...*

Notice this, two things ...

*... human tradition ... and the*

*elemental spiritual forces of  
this world ...*

*... rather than on Christ.  
Colossians 2:8 (NIV)*

No matter how good any of that sounds, Paul says ...

**Don't be deceived ...**

*For in Christ all the fullness of  
the Deity lives in bodily form  
...*

In other words, there is nothing more "out there" than Jesus.

*... and in Christ you have  
been brought to fullness.  
Colossians 2:9 (NIV)*

Meaning that nothing you learn from a philosophy based on human wisdom and



some kind of “spiritual force” can add anything “more” than what you already have in knowing Jesus and following Jesus ...

... because you have in Him all you need for the life you want ...

... which is why Paul goes on to give two very specific and strong warnings to them ...

... which, to you and me living two millennia later, are going to sound like so much spiritual mumbo jumbo but, I promise you, they are not.

In fact, what Paul is about to say to the first century Colossian Christians is actually descriptive of a philosophy that is circulating among us, right now, in this culture, which, throughout this series, I’ve been calling the “cultural gospel.”

## **First, he says ...**

*Therefore ...*

Meaning "because in Jesus you already have everything you need for the life you want."

Therefore ...

*... do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.*

*Colossians 2:16 (NIV)*

## **And then he says ...**

*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual*

*mind.*  
*2:18 (NIV)*

*Colossians*

Notice, two times Paul warns his readers "don't let anyone."

- Don't let anyone judge you by some made-up rules concerning religious activities which have an appearance of being spiritual but are not.
- And don't let anyone try to disqualify you – to say "you're not part of this" – because of what *they've* seen that you *haven't* seen.

In Paul's day, there were people going around – well-intentioned people, I might add – saying that if you really wanted to be "all that" spiritually, then ...

- You needed to follow a certain set of

rules beyond what Jesus taught.

- And you needed to have some “special revelation of truth.”

“Because this is the way,” they said, “to have the kind of life you want for yourself and for the whole world.”

However, as Paul points out ...

- If you failed at following those rules, you were out – judged as being unacceptable.
- And if you didn’t have that revelation – that special insight given only to a few, you were also out – literally, disqualified.

And, amazingly, the cultural gospel of our day is saying a very similar thing.

And this is why I am so concerned as a pastor. This is why we've taken five weeks to talk about this with three more to go.

The message we're hearing again and again in music, in media, in sports, in our schools – pretty much everywhere you turn – is that ...

- If you fail to follow these rules that we've developed ...
- If you don't see what we see, i.e. if you're not "woke" like we are ...

(and I talked specifically about this in last week's message – if you missed it, check it out in the media section of our app and podcast) ...

If you're not "woke" like we are – aware to what's really going on in the world as it concerns injustice and oppression ...

... then you are out.

Actually, the word is *cancelled*.

“If you don’t see what we see and say what we say and do what we do, we’re going to cancel you. You will be judged as unacceptable. You will be disqualified from further participation.”

## **Cancel Culture Defined**

And you have to be living under a rock somewhere to not be aware of how big of a deal this has become in recent days.

For example, there’s the high school student who was initially accepted to Harvard, but that acceptance was rescinded due to inappropriate messages he wrote when he was 16.

Even though he expressed regret, commenting that “I see the world through different eyes and am embarrassed by the petty, flippant kid represented in those screenshots,” Harvard’s admissions committee voted to keep him out.<sup>i</sup>

He was cancelled.

And then there’s Niel Golightly, the 62-year-old senior vice president of communications for Boeing Corp, who last month was forced to resign following an employee’s complaint about an article he wrote ...

- For the U.S. Naval Institute Magazine (not exactly something you’d find on the average coffee table)
- 33 years ago.

In 1987, while he was on active duty as a Navy pilot, Golightly had written an article explaining why he thought women in combat was a bad idea – which was hardly a controversial position at the time.

Even though he said that he now considers what he wrote “embarrassingly wrong and offensive,” he agreed to resign “for the good of the company.”<sup>ii</sup>

He was cancelled.

And the list of examples could go on and on.

But what exactly is cancel culture? According to Dictionary.com ...

**“Cancel culture refers to the popular practice of withdrawing support of public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive.”**



... which, to be fair, isn't all that unreasonable.

For example, if I don't like the kind of food you serve in your restaurant or the service your staff provides – if it's objectionable to me in some way – not only am *I* not coming back, I'm probably telling other people.

In effect, I'm cancelling your business.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing because if enough people do it, that will motivate you to prepare better food and provide better service.

More to the point of our present cultural strife, when people who are in the minority have no other way to be heard and taken seriously by the dominant culture, "cancellation" is one of the only options they have.

For instance, in the first large-scale demonstration against racial discrimination in this country – the Montgomery bus boycott of 1965 ...

African Americans refused to ride city buses in Montgomery, AL because of an ordinance that required them to sit in the back and then, if there weren't enough seats in the front for white riders, to give up those seats. (It's embarrassing to think that really was a law).

And because 75% of bus riders in Montgomery were black – 40,000 per day on average – their boycott, their “cancellation” of the bus company, had an effect. And, eventually, the law changed.<sup>iii</sup>

Of course, *the people behind the law didn't change* which isn't surprising since laws have no power to change a human heart.

But my point is that the idea of canceling someone or something isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's a way to hold them accountable – a way to stand up against things that are not right and create an opportunity for positive change to occur.

... which is why, as I have said each week, I believe many of those who have currently embraced this strategy really do mean well in spite of how it's often portrayed.

In fact, for many of those folks, it's actually part of a *larger strategy* intended to bring about the greater good.

*In fact*, for many of those folks, this is part of their *gospel*.

As I've said throughout this series a "gospel" is simply a proclamation of good news which says, "There's a better way to bring about the

life we all want for ourselves and for our world than the way we are currently following.”

## **An Evaluation**

Of course, the question is ... does it really do that?

Does “canceling” as it happens so frequently in this culture really end up furthering the greater good?

Unfortunately, I have to say that I think not. I think cancel culture as it is commonly practiced today is very destructive.

Furthermore, I think that anyone who engages in this practice – whether liberal or conservative (and conservatives *do* practice it) – is as foolish and harmful as the behavior and person to which they are reacting.

As to *why* I think that – and I should first say that I’m no sociologist, but I do pay attention to what people say and do ...

I’ve seen four things that are characteristic of those who believe that “the basic story of the world” is oppressor vs. oppressed ... which is where cancel culture seems to be most active these days.

I’ve talked about this narrative in the past couple of messages, so I won’t go into detail again today other than to say that, in this way of seeing things, THE overarching problem that must be solved is the sin of *oppression*.

And *oppression* happens whenever those who are *not* of the dominant culture are *not only* mistreated by the dominant culture; it also happens whenever they feel pressure to conform to its values and norms ...

... which is why a white hetero Christian male is, in reality, an oppressor even though he has never directly said or done anything hurtful ...

- To someone who isn't white ...
- Or someone who isn't "straight" ...
- Or someone who isn't a Christian ...
- Or to a woman ...

And if that sounds far-fetched to you, according to this gospel, it's for one of two reasons.

Either ...

- You're blind because you are in the oppressor class and that's just how privilege works.

- Or you are in the oppressed class and you've internalized the voice of your oppressors.

In other words, the thoughts you think aren't even your own and you don't even realize it. That's how badly oppressed you are.

In either case, you have to get with the program.

You have to make a commitment to start looking at the world this way.

You have to sell out to being "woke" and to staying "woke" to all the ways in which women and people of color and non-Christians and non-heterosexuals are marginalized and victimized.

But what exactly does this commitment look

like?

Well, from what I see and what I've learned from the stories of people who've think this way, there are four unwritten rules.

**Rule #1. You must agree with *all* dogma, or you will be canceled.**

Now, there are various ways to describe that dogma but, one commentator has written that, according to this cultural Gospel, all Americans should ...

- Oppose "hate speech"
- Support (nearly) unlimited Third World immigration
- Always take the side of the #MeToo accusers
- Ascribe all disparities in life outcomes to



structural prejudice

- Attack “climate deniers”
- Worship at the altar of diversity
- And, generally, blame America, white people, and men for almost all that ails humanity.<sup>iv</sup>

That may be a little strong but, if you’ve been paying attention, those are the issues that we’ve heard so much about in recent days and around which cancel culture operates.

**Rule #2. You must *actively* support the cause and repeat “the mantra” (whatever it is for a given issue) when called upon, or you will be canceled.**

You either #resist the hegemonic white supremacist power structure (which includes Western civilization classes and Columbus

Day) or you are a racist.<sup>v</sup>

You must spell out on your website or your store window that you believe “Black Lives Matter” ... or that you “believe women” ... or “whatever must be said right now.”

You must march against racist policing or at least, express your support of those who do.

Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying.

- Black lives do matter and there's nothing wrong with expressing that.
- Many women have been victimized by men and there's nothing wrong with pointing that out.
- There are policemen who are less than honorable – racist even – and that should be pointed out.

What I'm talking about is the rule – the commandment even – that you *must* express these things or risk being canceled ...

... which makes breaking Rule #3 all the more serious.

**Rule #3. You must never question dogma, or you will be canceled.**

For example, because all men are oppressors, all women must be believed. (This was the mantra of the #Me,Too movement).

Therefore, you must not question if a woman who accuses a man is actually telling the truth.

For example, because police are part of the power structure implemented by the dominant culture and therefore oppressors

(willing or unwilling) of minority culture ...

You must not question whether the data actually supports the claim that white cops are disproportionately killing black men and women.

And you should never wonder if perhaps a bigger cultural injustice than racism or sexism or homophobia is that 44M defenseless children have been aborted since *Roe v. Wade*.

Nor should you think about the fact that 19M of them were black.<sup>vi</sup>

Neither should you ask about the data that repeatedly year-after-year show that the greatest factor in the victimization of our entire culture – but especially young black men and women – is the breakdown of the two-parent family structure.<sup>vii</sup>

So ...

Rule #1. You must agree with all dogma

Rule #2. You must actively support the cause and repeat "the mantra" when called upon.

Rule #3. You must never question dogma.

**And Rule #4. If you have ever in the past broken any of the above rules, you will be canceled.**

... which is what the story of the potential Harvard student and the story of Niel Golightly – along with countless others – serve to illustrate.

Now, again, what I'm saying may sound harsh, but I really don't think people who

follow these rules (or enforce them) want anything less than a better world where people are treated justly.

My point – my contention – is simply that this way of living isn't "good news" at all. And it isn't the best way to get there.

In fact, it's actually counterproductive.

For one thing ...

**1. In a cancel culture, people will say and do things they really don't believe (hypocrisy) just to avoid being cancelled.**

Their heart is not in it which means they're fakers and posers.

To quote something Jesus once said about the religious leaders of His day, "They look good on the outside but, on the inside they're full of dead and rotting bones."

They really don't believe. They're hypocrites.

**2. In a cancel culture, people will hide their “sin” and broadcast their “righteousness” (pride) to avoid being canceled.**

And what a terrible way to live:

- Knowing that you have messed up in the past and will mess up in the future and the fear of being discovered for what you are.
- The pressure of having to constantly make sure that people around you and on social media know how into the cause you are.

... which is a prescription for pride or for demoralization – “I just can't do it so I quit.”

**3. Finally, in a cancel culture, there is no relief**

## **from the guilt and shame of failure.**

Once you have been written off because of what you thought or what you said or what you did that didn't conform to the rules and expectations, there is no coming back from it.

That's because your mistake is not simply a guilty *act*. Rather, your mistake now defines your *identity*.

Your guilt turns you into a *bad person* worthy of shame, which is why redemption doesn't come by fixing the mistake, and why an apology isn't enough.<sup>viii</sup>

## **Even Better**

Now, I don't know about you, but any system which is almost *guaranteed* to produce hypocrisy, pride and shame doesn't sound like something I want to buy into and be a part



of ...

... even if its goal really is good and pure and seeking the best for our world.

But the question is – at least for today – does the Gospel according to Jesus provide us with a better alternative than cancel culture for dealing with bad people who think and say and do things that fail to conform to the rules?

Obviously, I think it does or I wouldn't be giving this message.

And I wouldn't be inviting you to consider not only following the way of Jesus when looking at the failures of others but also *accepting* Jesus and what He has done about *your* failures.

Because if the complete truth about you and the truth about me was known and put up on

the screen for everyone to see, the shame would be crushing, and the cancellation would be deserved.

So, what do we know about Jesus and cancel culture? Three things, I think.

Let's start with this one.<sup>ix</sup>

### **1. Jesus called “cancelled” people his friends.**

In fact, his circle of followers included a betrayer, a thief, and a prostitute, just to name a few.

He was unwilling to “cancel” the worst of the worst, the baddest of the bad, and the guiltiest of the guilty.

He moved toward those whom society moved away from.

He befriended, loved, and touched the outcast, the misfit, the leper, the liar, the sexually deviant.

Jesus ...

- Refused to dismiss those who had been dismissed
- Refused to reject those who had been rejected
- Refused to denounce those who had been denounced
- And refused to shame those who had been shamed.

In fact, his closest friends were of such ill-repute that the religious leaders concluded Jesus must be an imposter because no self-respecting man of God would embrace the

kinds of people He embraced!

## **2. And yet, Jesus never closed his eyes to the reality of sin.**

In what is probably the most well-known of all the stories of Jesus and his association with "sinners," a woman caught in the act of adultery is brought to him on a Jerusalem street.

Most likely she is naked and ashamed trying to cover herself as the religious leaders test Jesus.

"Jesus, as you know, our law says that anyone who commits adultery should be stoned. What say you?"

Yet another gotcha question ... which Jesus doesn't directly answer. Instead he moves to the more important issue that no one wants to think about.

“Whoever among you is without sin, let him cast the first stone.”

And one by one they all leave until it’s just Jesus and this terrified woman.

And Jesus says to her, “you and all women have been oppressed for centuries by the male-dominated hierarchy of this culture and that’s why I did what I just did. Those men are evil, and I just canceled them.”

No, that’s not what He said.

**He said,**

*“Where are your accusers?  
Didn’t even one of them  
condemn you?”*

*“No, Lord,” she said.*

*And Jesus said, "Neither do I.  
Go and sin no more."  
John 8:10-11 (NLT)*

It was scenes like this one that led John to say that Jesus "was sent from God, full of grace and truth."

On the one hand, he never watered down the reality of sin; he never pretended it didn't exist and he never justified a person's sinful behavior. That was truth.

On the other, he accepted them in spite of it. He valued them. He loved them. That was grace.

And that's how God treats all of us. Instead of canceling us for all the ways we have failed, are failing and will continue to fail, he loves us and values us.

And he does that because we were made for

more than what we currently are. And he wants to help us get there ... which is why ...

And this is the third thing about Jesus and cancel culture.

**3. Whereas our culture (and sometimes the church) cancels *people* who have done terrible things, Jesus cancels the terrible *things* that people are cancelled for.**

In that letter we've been looking at from the Apostle Paul, right in the middle of the part where he's going on about how much greater Jesus is than the traditions and special revelations that everyone supposedly needed to have and follow, He explains one of the reasons why Jesus is so great.

**He writes ...**

*He forgave us all our sins,  
having canceled the charge  
of our legal indebtedness,*

*which stood against us and  
condemned us; he has taken it  
away, nailing it to the cross.*

*Colossians 2:14 (NIV)*

All of the sins and scandals that cancel culture chooses not to forget about us – all of the sins and scandals we choose not to forget about ourselves ... Jesus chooses not to remember.<sup>x</sup>

Instead of canceling us, Jesus cancels the charge – the legitimate charge – against us.

## **What Now?**

And this I think has so many applications to us, but, in the limited time we have left, I want to share just three of them.

**1. If you're a Christian, treat others with truth and grace ...**



Especially those who try to cancel *you*.

We'll talk more about this in a few weeks but one of the most consistent principles of Christianity – and this runs from the words of Jesus through the letters and writings of many of the Apostles ...

One of the most consistent principles of Christianity is that we not repay evil with evil and that, instead, we treat others better than they deserve because of how we have been treated by God.

In other words, we don't cancel them because He did not cancel us.

**2. If you're a Christian, don't “cancel” other Christians who do not support the cause and repeat “the mantra” God has assigned to you.**

What does that mean?

It means that God gives different kinds of passions and abilities to his children and we are not to blast each other because of those differences.

And there is so much of that going on these days. It's said. It's heartbreaking.

And honestly, I think it's demonic.

Throughout history, Christians ought to be sold out for ...

- Racial justice
- The poor and the marginalized
- The right to life of the unborn
- Sanctity of marriage = sex between man and a woman in marriage

... but two of those are liberal, two are conservative - never combined in any political party, only in catholic social teaching and

bibl xty

enormous pressure on churches to speak on two and be quiet on two political parties say “you can’t have them all together.”

If God tells you to march to support the value of black lives, do it.

If God tells you to volunteer at PWC to support unborn babies, do it.

Do what you think is going to help. In Jesus, we are all called to “fix” some problem without judging others for what they are called to fix!

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So, if you’re a Christian ...

- Treat others with truth and grace.
- Don’t cancel them because they’re not

in love with the cause God has given to  
you

Finally, if you're *not* a Christian, I think you  
need to ...

### **3. Turn to Jesus and invite Him to cancel your sins.**

Don't try to hide your sin and display your  
righteousness.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

### 1. Food Truck tonight

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/canceled-understanding-eastern-honor-shame/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8486747/UPDATE-4-Boeing-communications-chief-resigns-decades-old-article-women-combat.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/montgomery-bus-boycott>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/commentary/how-leftists-critical-race-theory-poisons-our-discussion-racism>

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<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> <https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2020/02/25/abortion-the-overlooked-tragedy-for-black-americans/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.dailysignal.com/2020/08/07/the-collapse-of-the-traditional-american-family/>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/canceled-understanding-eastern-honor-shame/>

<sup>ix</sup> This next section is from Tullian Tchividian's excellent and inspiring post found here: <https://www.tullian.net/articles/jesus-and-cancel-culture?rq=cancel%20culture>

<sup>x</sup> Ibid