

“Following Jesus in a Cancel Culture”
Greetings From 2020
Downtown & Lexington
August 2, 2020

Hey, I wanna say hello to those of you who are newer with us. I happen to know that even with everything going on, there is a good group of you who have found your way into our church family and I love it. I look forward to getting to know you a little bit at some point.

For now, what you need to know is that we are running everything through our LifeGroups. Which is not really a change for us other than, to begin the fall we are having LifeGroups host their own Sunday Gatherings. I'm recording this on Thursday with a few handfuls of people here live. We have made it available for up to 100 people to join in on Thursdays if you'd like to come.

Let me tell you why we landed on this as our plan to begin the fall...

For what it's worth, we have already been told that this plan is too much too soon. And we've also been told it's overly fearful and we should be doing more. The truth is, either of those could be true. We don't know. It's hard to know the exact right balance of precaution/ protection of others and desire to return to normalcy. For what it's worth, we've already received concerns from folks that the limited things we are doing are too much too soon!

Our thought process leading to our current plan was primarily guided by the rising Covid-19 case numbers in our state as well as the decisions of the local school boards. Local schools deciding not to meet in person for the first month back, which factored strongly into our decision. Another factor for us is the strength of our LifeGroups. We are uniquely designed for groups to host their own Sunday Gatherings effectively, which is a much safer option than larger corporate gatherings. I suspect other churches would not have this as a viable option as most churches have far fewer people in groups compared to their gathering attendance. Too many people would be left out if they went that route.

With all that said, it's still true that you might be right. All I can say is that we are simply doing our best to consider all the factors and move forward wisely. As circumstances change we are always discussing other options. Any plans we make right now are "fluid" at best and could change at any point!"

We've been doing some work in this series, looking at particular cultural issues during a year that seems drunk and on fire. So far we've talked about God's use of hardship to produce glory in us. We've talked about our polarized political environment and we've talked about racial injustice...all of which have been brought to the forefront these past few months. A lot of this series we are talking about large, external, circumstantial issues that we have to wade through as individuals and as a church... Today we're focusing on a much more personal and interpersonal issue that is making all of those other things much worse if we don't start to get it nailed down.

Our scripture for today is from Colossians chapter 3

Colossians 3:12-17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these

put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Paul here paints a beautiful picture of what a community of Jesus-followers should be like. He calls us to pursue becoming a community of compassion, kindness, patience, forgiveness. Full of peace. He says that love is to bind us together in harmony. Different notes are brought together into one unified symphony because we love each other. Hearts full of thankfulness to God with a deep abiding purpose of glorifying God in everything we do.

Let's specifically look back at verse 13 for our purposes today: "Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Let me contrast that with the spirit of the age in our country.

I would never publicly admit in a sermon to being a fan of comedian Dave Chappelle. He can be very inappropriate and I wouldn't even be comfortable publicly admitting to ever seeing a show of his. With that said, in a recent show, he did a bit where he was doing impressions, and they were very silly and aggressive. And then at one point he says to the crowd, "ok guess who I'm pretending to be now...uuuhhh...if I catch you ever doing anything wrong, doesn't matter when it is, could be years in the future or could be years ago in the past, I'll never watch your shows again and I will try to ruin your life!" And then he says "ok who is that?" And the crowd starts yelling guesses, a few people yell "Trump!" And then Chappelle says "that's my impression of you! It's you the audience. That's what I think of when I look at you." And a few people laugh awkwardly.

That was Chappelle's way of bringing up what seems to be a growing cultural reality. When a public figure sins, does, or says something they shouldn't or isn't socially correct, there seems to be very little patience, bearing with, forgiveness and instead, it's a rush to distance ourselves from that person and make them pay for it however we can.

It's something that has been called "cancel culture". As you'd expect, that term itself is controversial. Here is how dictionary.com defines it "The practice of withdrawing support for (or canceling) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive."

Our former president said this recently:

Barack Obama

"I do get the sense among some people, that there is this belief, that the way of me making change is to be as judgemental as possible about other people. And that's enough. If I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right or used the wrong word or verb, then I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself, about how woke I was. That's not bringing about change. If all you're doing is casting stones, then you're probably not going to get that far. That's easy to do. "

I think the pandemic has even heightened our relational strains. Because of the way I might get this virus...is you. Other people are the carriers. So I don't know who to trust. Everyone is a potential danger to me. You might have the virus, I don't know, and I don't trust you because I can't see your face behind that mask!

So we have a cultural moment of heightened judgment and condemnation, fear, distrust, and suspicion.

I certainly have some concerns about the limited sort of public discourse and discussion possible when people are fearful that an opposing viewpoint might cost them their jobs. But that's not my primary concern.

I'm not trying to make the world act like the church. That's always going to bear more frustration than fruit. In fact, without Jesus, it makes sense to cancel anyone who disagrees with you or hurts you. My concern is that I don't want the church to act like the world.

What I don't want is for cancel culture affecting us in such a way that it robs us of our ability to fulfill the high and beautiful calling of scripture in places like Colossians 3. Instead of, when we are bothered or hurt by someone we distance ourselves and make them pay...we want to be people of compassion, understanding, forgiveness, forbearance. In other words, we want a gospel culture, not a cancel culture.

So I'd like to be very practical today; to use the language of Colossians 3, there are three different types of "complaints". I want to give three categories of ways that we can be bothered or hurt by others and some tools to navigate as followers of Jesus.

This is something that Jon mentioned just a few weeks ago but I want to go into greater detail on it in three different ways:

1- Sin

2- Unmet Expectation

3- Misunderstanding

Those are the three categories. How do we handle each of those? How do we make sure our community looks and operates more like the church of God than a cancel culture?

I'll go ahead and give you my thesis right here. Here's my big idea. As the community of Jesus, we are both enabled and commanded to forgive sin. Not even sin separates us from one another because of the resources we have in Christ. My concern is when I too often see, not sin but unmet expectation or misunderstanding causes us to separate from one another. Something has gone wrong when that is happening. As Christians we forgive sin. So how much more so do we move forward together when it is only unmet expectation or misunderstanding that it's come between us?

And if that is not the reality, then I grow concerned we resemble more of the cancel culture than a gospel culture.

Let's go through our three different categories.

1- Sin

We are sinners and we exist with other sinners. So we sin against each other. And sin hurts. It hurts when you are sinned against.

As we read earlier from Colossians 3:13: “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” So you must. Must forgive. This is the only shot we have at following Jesus together as a community. This is the only shot you have to walk deeply with others for any length of time. If you are content with shallow superficial relationships with others then you might get by without forgiveness. But if you want to actually be known and actually know others...you will have to be rich in forgiveness.

And this is the key phrase here. As the Lord has forgiven you. How does Jesus forgive you? Only if your sin wasn't a big deal? Only if you pay him back sufficiently?

With my kids, it's a constant occurrence that one of them sins against the other. Just like all kids, mine have moments of unbelievable beauty and kindness and goodness that melt my heart. And then they are capable of very quickly doing something so selfish and mean and hurtful to their sibling that it'll make your head spin.

So we have a reconciliation routine that runs on repeat in our house. When you sin against someone, after whatever the consequence was, you go to them and apologize and be specific. But one of the things Courtney and I noticed was, after being apologized to, the victim sibling would frequently say “it's ok.” So you'd get this quick exchange “I'm sorry I slapped you in the face and pulled your hair and tackled you to took that toy from you.” And the other child would say “it's ok.”

And Courtney and I would be standing there thinking uh, no it's not ok. You slapped and pulled hair and tackled and stole a toy. None of those things are ok on their own and you just did them in sequence! This ends with jail time if you do this when you're older.

So we had to change our routine and now there is an apology, followed by “will you forgive me?” And the other person doesn't say “it's ok” because it wasn't ok. They say “I forgive you.”

I wonder if some of you think that forgiving someone means saying what they did was ok. That's not what forgiveness is. If what they did was ok it wouldn't need to be forgiven.

Forgiveness does not mean you are saying what they did was no big deal. Sin is a big deal. Jesus died for sin. It's that big of a deal. Forgiveness does not mean you are dismissing what they have done. It means you no longer hold it against them. You release them from the debt. You absorb the cost of their sin and do not take it out on them.

Forgiveness is about seeing someone not as their sin and therefore not treating them as their sin. Seeing them as image-bearer and if they are a Christian, as in Christ. And choosing to treat them that way. feeling sadness or anger or grief about sin is fine. but we don't treat them as their sin, we treat them as in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This doesn't mean we don't let people experience consequences for their sin, they should, it means we treat them as in Christ instead of as their sin.

We have a cancel culture that does not value forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a definitive mark of the covenant community of faith.

This is supposed to be the beauty of the Christian community! that we stick it out with each other even when we sin against each other. We have the resources for conflict to lead to more depth and intimacy. It doesn't have to break us apart.

But when being sinned against, painful though it can be, causes you to say “either you must go or I must go“, then cancel culture has invaded the church. And we are in need of gospel renewal. We forgive and bear with one another in sin. In actual sin. How much more so do we stick it out together through unmet expectations and misunderstandings...which leads us to...

2- Unmet Expectations

I'm gonna pull a bait and switch here for the sake of time. I will cover unmet expectations in the midweek podcast. There are a few things I want to say that I just don't have enough time for. Check out the midweek podcast.

3- Misunderstanding

By this, I mean the assuming and assigning a motive or reason why that person did or said what they did. A reason that may or may not be accurate. The assumption that you know why someone did or said what they did.

We can learn a few things from the 1944 study “experimental study of apparent behavior.”

We insert things into stories intuitively.

We make up stories about why so and so looked at us the way they did. When I don't see someone for a long time I make up a story about why.

When I see someone post something on social media that I don't like, I make up a reason as to why they posted it.

Stories about our spouses, families, bosses, pastors.

So it's not simply that your friend forgot to call. You insert his or her failure to call you into a story about why. You assume to know their motive, their reasoning, their thought process. And this can get us into all sorts of trouble. ESPECIALLY if we tend to assign negative motives.

This is increasingly the pattern in the US.

Cynicism. I assume the worst about everyone's motives. Always skeptical.

I have been introducing my kids to the original scooby doo. The originals from the 60's with the people who run back and forth across the screen with a ghost chasing them and it's somehow wonderful. And the other night, my kids were asking to watch an episode before bed. It was too late to watch an episode so I said, “I will let you watch an episode in the morning”. We don't watch a lot of TV and we especially don't watch a lot of tv in the mornings. My kids usually watch one show after nap/independent playtime at the most. But I said they could watch scooby doo when they woke up.

So that night I am tucking them into bed, giving hugs and kisses, every night I say “I love you and Jesus loves you”...every night of my kids' lives that's what they've heard. And as I'm leaving the room my

daughter says “Wait I know what you’re doing! You are hoping we forget about that scooby doo episode while we sleep so we won't actually watch it!”

Now...the truth is, I like to give my kids what they want so long as what they want is good for them. If they asked me for bread, I would happily give it to them. If they asked me for a scorpion I would not give it to them, because I love them. And scooby doo is somewhere between bread and scorpion and they love it and it brings me joy to give them things they love, when those things are ok for them.

But somehow my daughter, between the time I said they could watch a scooby doo episode in the morning when they wake up and the time I kissed her and hugged her and told her that I love her and Jesus loves her, decided what I was really up to was trying to deprive her and take from her and I was hoping she and her brother would forget about scooby doo by the time they woke up. She took my words and actions, which I actually intended for good, and turned them to bad in her mind by assigning me a negative motive.

She’s 7. She’s gotta get out of my house when she’s 18. So we’ve got 11 years to work on that. I just want you to notice that it’s possible to take any action and make it evil if you assign a negative motive to that person.

As Christians, we believe in total depravity. Sin has infected and affected every aspect of our lives. But we do not believe in utter depravity...that people are always doing the absolute worst thing possible. That’s not true. And maybe, maybe, your dad loves you and is glad to give you the relatively good gift of a 1960’s scooby-doo episode when you wake up and there isn’t anything else to it.

Be careful of the stories you tell yourself about other people.

-This person called to ask if I’d go help with something. But you know what, he didn’t ask how I was doing or what was going on with me. You know why? Because he only cares about what I can do for him!

-She didn’t invite me to that event I saw pictures of. You know why? Because we aren’t actually the church family that I thought we were.

-I saw how he looked at me and I know what he was thinking.

-I know when she says this, what she really means is that.

Some of you have experienced this sort of breakdown, where we are nitpicking facial expression and tone and word choice and everything that is said has secret hidden meaning as though we’re talking in code and it’s just like, what are we doing here?

Proverbs chapter 18 has multiple warnings about assuming you know why someone did something or what they are thinking and rushing to judgment.

Proverbs 18:2 - “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

Proverbs 18:13 - “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”

Emotionally Healthy Relationships by Peter & Geri Scazzero:

“The ninth commandment reads: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). Every time we make an assumption about someone who has hurt or disappointed us, without confirming it, we believe a lie about this person in our head. Because we have not checked it out with him or her, it is very possible that we are believing something untrue. It is also likely that we will pass that false assumption around to others.

When we leave reality for a mental creation of our own doing (hidden assumptions), we create a counterfeit world. When we do this, it can properly be said that we exclude God from our lives because God does not exist outside of reality and truth. In doing so we wreck relationships by creating endless confusion and conflict. The Bible has much to say about not taking on the role of judge to others (Matthew 7:1-5).”

You aren't healthy if you stop giving people the benefit of the doubt and start getting suspicious. You assign negative motives without confirmation.

Ok. Let me give us some positive steps to take. these will improve your marriage, your friendships, your relationships at work, in fact, they will improve every single relationship in your life if you adopt them.

First, you have 3 options. When you are bothered, offended, hurt, let down, angry with a brother or sister in Christ.

1-Drop it and forgive. let love cover a multitude of sins

2-Confront, clarify and forgive.

3-Let bitterness and resentment grow. Judge, condemn, distance yourself. Cancel them.

-Sometimes you just need to drop it. You don't need to do anything about the fact that not enough people told you happy birthday. You don't need to talk to anyone or bring it up. You don't need to process it. You don't need to pay someone to help you process it. Let love cover a multitude of sins and move on. It's forgiven and I'm past it.

You need to drop that theory you have about that person. Just drop it. Bear with others in love. Don't make it a big deal. Don't bring it up.

Our culture is addicted to offense taking. Whereas scripture says:

Proverbs 19:11

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”

It is to our glory to overlook an offense.

I'll give you a little tip. Try acting like the other person's defense attorney in your mind. What's a possible good reason why he or she did what they did? Don't allow your thoughts to only go to bad reasons, also consider good or neutral reasons. Maybe that's all you'll need to do to realize you can simply move past it.

-Sometimes you need to go to the person and clear it up. “You did this. You said that. I assume you did it because you were thinking “blank”. Is that true?”

Maybe you're right. By going to them you give them a chance to apologize and repent. Or maybe you're wrong. And then you give yourself a chance to repent because you have assumed and assigned a negative motive to your brother and sister in Christ whom you are not supposed to judge harshly.

-The third option is the bad one. I don't know which of the first two you need to choose. Some of us are tentative to actually seek someone out to confront or clarify. Others of us are overly sensitive and we analyze every relational interaction to find fault and we want to bring up every single offense, real or imagined, and continue to bring it up years after it happened. I'm giving you the categories and trust the Spirit to lead you.

-Whatever complaint you have, you MUST forgive. You MUST. If they sinned against you. If it was a genuine sin and they were wrong and you are hurt. You need to forgive. If it was an unmet expectation...nobody sinned. You just expected something that didn't happen. That can be painful. That can cause grief. You can be hurt by unmet expectations. Those are human emotions that are fine. But if you hold it against others...you are wrong. And if it's a misunderstanding, maybe even you've been assuming a negative motive that may or may not even be present...seek to understand what they actually meant.

If someone sins against us, we forgive them. How much more then do we continue to move forward in good standing with one another when someone simply didn't do what you had hoped or expected, or if it's actually us who sinned by assuming a negative motive?

In a community of any kind. Family, neighborhood, friend group, co-workers...you are going to be sinned against and you will sin against others. You will have expectations of others that they do not meet and others will have expectations of you that you do not meet. And you are going to have misunderstandings where what you think someone means isn't what they actually mean, where you misinterpret intentions. And all of that creates pain. It legitimately, really hurts. And if the only real tool you have to deal with pain is to distance yourself from the people who hurt you then you will never be able to have significant lasting relationships with anyone in any sphere of your life.

The quality and depth of your relationships is proportional to our ability to forgive.

And in doing so, let's have a better culture in our midst than what exists in the world. Where broken people are given grace and space to mess up and sin without it tearing us apart.