



A Sweet Summer

2 – Killing Cancel Culture with Kindness

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are in Part 2, a message that has been brewing in me for about a year. I make no apologies for the fact that I hate cancel culture with every ounce of my being. When Rene spoke last week, I sat in here for all three of Rene's messages, and I was deeply convicted. Would you raise your hand if you were deeply convicted? Okay, if you disagreed, would you raise your hand?

My message before today, before Rene spoke last week, was called *Three Reason Why I Hate Cancel Culture*. You can see it changed a little bit. But I still was able to keep the word *kill* in it. Growing up, how many of you had a mom that when you came home and said somebody was bullying you or picking on you... What did your mom say? Okay, it was only my mom. So, I can attribute this to my mother. She was the original with "kill them with kindness."

That's what we're going to do because I want to give cancel culture a painful death; that's my flesh. But as followers of Jesus, I'm not going to be a part of the outrage machine. I want to be a follower of Jesus that knows clearly why we do not cancel people, and why we believe that the gospel changes people's lives, and it's why we know that when we enter into conversation about things that are going on in culture, there is a way that we do it.

Would you raise your hand if your mouth has ever gotten you in trouble? It's all of us, yes! We say and do stupid things all the time. How many of you would say it's somebody you know more than you that gets in trouble with their mouth? Okay, good; I just want to thank you for your honesty. I love when husbands and wives both raise their hand.

Scripture puts it this way and this is where we want to start. Proverbs 18: 21 - ***The tongue has the power of life and death...*** We know that our mouths are powerful but we're really only doing one or two things when we speak. We're either bringing life or death. When we enter into conversations, no matter what the conversation is about, are we going to bring life to that conversation, or will we kill that conversation? We go online and post and we're either going to bring life online or we're going to bring death. We comment on someone else's post and we're either bringing life or death.

As we jump into this, how should a Christian respond to cancel culture, how should we move forward with this? I want to start by just giving some examples. By the way, the last year gave us plenty of examples, almost daily. You would turn on the news to figure out who or what are we canceling today. We aren't short on illustrations. I'm going to share just a couple of them with you.

The first one was sad for me when this was trying to get canceled. I felt very protective for my friend Mr. Potato Head. It's because they don't want gender specific toys anymore. But I used Mr. Potato Head to teach my children about gender. And some of you are well invested in Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head. But CANCELED!! That's what we said about him.

In the first service, I had a whole bit on these four pictures, and nobody got it. They thought I was cancelling these people. I had a couple that every time I went CANCEL!!, they would gasp, and you could see it; they got mad. I had to pause in the middle of the 8:30 service and go, "This isn't me! I'm not canceling these people; cancel culture is cancelling these. I don't know where you've been the last year, but a lot has been going on. Get out from underneath your rock and pay attention. Anyway... See what happens? I shouldn't be teaching on this. We should have Rene here for a second Sunday. I'm so wound up over cancel culture.

And I sleep on one of these every night. I have a My Pillow. I love My Pillow. I don't go to the chiropractor as much. But he got a little too passionate about voting irregularity... CANCEL!! Right? We're done with him. And now it has cost literally – I've heard, somebody told me today – billions. CANCEL!! "We're done with you, we don't like you, we don't agree with you, go away, just go away."

And then Pepe La Pew. Pervert! CANCEL!!

Last one. I could give you a bunch, but I had to keep these clean. Oh yeah! Green Eggs and Ham... CANCEL! You're nonsensical rhyming. We could sit up here and go through 30 minutes of this, and it would spin you all up and work you all up. We don't need to do anymore of that as this church will soon be cancelled. I promised myself that 10:00 was going to be calmer and... it ain't! It ain't working out that way.

But here's what cancel culture does. Let's just break it down a little bit. Cancel culture **targets** people. So, today, we're not going to talk about brands and we're not going to talk about cartoons; we're going to talk about people and why, follower of Jesus, we don't cancel people... ever! But people get online, and there's this one person online that I've been following that Amy has asked me to stop following because it just triggers me. I can't help it. This person gets up every day and targets someone new. Not just targets someone new.

The next part is you've got to **dig up** someone's past. My question for you is how far do you want me going back in your past to dig something up? How far do you want me going back? College? High School? The recent high school graduate says, "No! fresh start. I just graduated. Nothing that happened in high school will ever be held against me."

We watch American Idol. In the top five, there was a young man in that was removed from the show for something that he posted. It was inappropriate; it was a terrible post, but he posted it when he was 12. I go, "Amy, is this where we're at?" Now we're going to cancel people doing stuff when they're 12. I thought college was safe. I thought high school was safe. I definitely thought elementary school was safe.

I just want to share this... I'm going to speak for every single person in here. You did stupid stuff when you were in elementary school. You were ignorant in junior high. This guy is really with me. He's like, "Yes I was. And I haven't smoked it since, honey. It's not happened since." How far are we going back?

It's not just that anymore, and this is why we're canceling left and right, because there's this intense pressure. Why? Because we have to **work up a mob**, a Twitter mob or social mob or just online frenzy. Get people all worked up. And, as we saw last week, Rene shared it perfectly. It doesn't need to be true; it just needs to be told. It doesn't have to be accurate information at all; we're just done with you. And then the bottom line is we're going to **destroy your reputation and career**.

I think Pastor Scotts Sauls, a good Presbyterian preacher, breaks this down for us so well; this is one of the best definitions I've read in a long time on cancel culture. *"Even when a person's overall history, accomplishments, and personal character are laudable, a negative word spoken these days can swiftly reduce him or her to a single defining worst moment. To make matters worse, a damning narrative doesn't even have to be true anymore to ruin a person's good name; in many cases, it's only needs to be told. In a quick flash, a voice is discredited and silenced, influence is lost, and career and reputation are destroyed."*

Even if you don't hear it in the message, it's definitely in the tone. I've had some people lately, when I posted on this months ago... They pushed back all the benefits of cancel culture. I'm going, "Yeah, you ain't getting me on that train." Because even if it's not spoken, it's the tone of cancel culture. And here's what it says, **"It's too late."** I don't care what you do; it's just too late,

"Your offense is too great." We can't have this. It goes against social norms in what you said or what you did. An actor was recently promoting his movie and he referred to Taiwan in the wrong way, and that offended China. You could tell. I went back and watched it this week. He wasn't making a political point; he made a mistake. You could just see it. It was too great.

"You can't change." As a counselor of couples, I hear this all the time. "He can't change." "She can't change." We need to know the difference between someone who can't change and someone who won't change. I believe every single person in here, and my Bible teaches that every single person in here can change.

The scripture says in Ecclesiastes 9:4 that if you are among the living, you have hope. You can change. Now, maybe you won't, you refuse to, you choose not to, but ultimately it comes down to "You're done. Go away. We don't want to hear from you anymore."

How many of you remember going to the principal's office? I spent a little bit of time in the principal's office. I became close with almost every principal of every school that I attended. You're like, "Shocker! I'm really surprised by that." And what got me into the principal's office? It wasn't my fists. It was my mouth. I was a lover not a fighter. I was a mouthy student. But I had great principles. I think we have great principles in this church.

Could you imagine though walking into your principal's office after you said or did something and your principal starts right off with, "Well, did you have hopes and dreams for the future?"

You're like, "Yeah."

"Well, they die here and now. You're done."

"I just called him a name."

"Sorry, go stand in the corner."

"For how long?"

"The rest of your life. You're not going to college. You're not getting a job. Nothing meaningful will ever happen to you."

We would all agree that's a terrible principal. What's a good principal? A good principal says, "I heard what you did; your teacher told me what you did. It was wrong, and guess what? I'm going to discipline you. There are consequences for what you did."

I could go through all the consequences I received from elementary through high school. But never was the tone of "This is so bad... you're completely done."

These are more than words; they are central to our faith and who we are as people who believe the gospel and walk with Jesus. Look at these words and let them just rest over you right now. Repentance, confession, forgiveness, redemption, restoration, reconciliation. We believe this. We believe you can confess your sins. We believe you can repent of your sins, repent of your wrong doing, find ultimate forgiveness from your Father in heaven. We believe you can be reconciled to you father. We believe relationships can be reconciled. We believe that. This is why we don't cancel people.

The Bible speaks about sin in terms of debt. Jesus used this example often: A certificate of debt. Someone has to pay for this wrong doing. Someone has to pay for your sins. Someone has to pay for my sin. Can we not all say amen to the fact that Jesus paid for us, he paid the price.

We read in Colossians 2: 13 – 15, ***13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness... And the idea here is of taking your debt, your sin debt, tearing it up, and nailing it to the cross. ...which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***

The problem with us though is... See, I could talk all day long about the sin you committed against your spouse, the sin you committed against a parent or child and talk about how it is forgiven, but doesn't it

change when that sin comes against me? When you sin against me, now you have a certificate of debt that I want you to take care of. When someone sins against us, they must pay.

Do you know what holding a grudge is? Holding a grudge is simply demanding payment. And I'm going to hold this grudge, I'm going to stonewall you, I'm going to avoid you, I'm going to send you to the corner for the rest... I don't want anything to do with you. You must pay. The problem is how do they pay?

Timothy Keller puts it this way. This is how we want them to pay. *"When someone seriously wrongs you, there is an absolutely avoidable sense that the wrongdoer owes you."* It's like you wrote out a certificate of debt when you were offended or hurt and you handed it to them. They owe you. *"The wrong has incurred an obligation, a liability, a debt. Anyone who has been wronged feels a compulsion to make the other person pay down that debt. We do that by hurting them, yelling at them, making them feel bad in some way, or just waiting and watching and hoping that something bad happens to them, so we can feel better."*

I think this is one reason why divorce is so ugly and so nasty. We have to keep in mind it's pain, and it's hurt, and you want them to pay for what they said to you, what they did to you, how they hurt you, how they left you, how they abandoned you. We hand them a certificate of debt.

Timothy Keller continues, *"Only after we see them suffer in some commensurate way do we sense that the debt has been paid and the sense of obligation is gone. The sense of debt/liability and obligation is impossible to escape. Anyone who denies it exists has simply not been wronged or sinned against in any serious way."*

We want people to pay and that's why cancel culture has taken it to a whole other level. What we're saying is, "There is no way for you to pay, we're just done with you, we want nothing more to do with you." But, follower of Jesus, this is not how we move forward.

The bottom line for the morning is **we don't cancel people because Jesus canceled our debt.** We never cancel people.

We talk a lot in this church about walking away from toxic people. Gary Thomas was here last year. He spoke on that in his book *When to Walk Away: Finding Freedom from Toxic People*. The year before that, we shared out of his book. What's the difference between walking away and canceling someone? I've wrestled with that this week. Canceling someone in message or in tone says, "There is no hope for you, we're done with you, what you did is too great, you're done, go away."

But when you walk away from a toxic person, you're leaving room for God to work, realizing that person can change. I believe that. I believe toxic people can change. Some would disagree with me on that. But I walk away, I create boundaries, I create a safety for myself. I'm able to walk away, but it is different than canceling someone. **We don't cancel people because Jesus canceled our debt.**

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Matthew 18. We're going to look at Verses 23-35. It's this great parable. We call it the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. I love these Kingdom stories. Really, they are earthly stories but with Kingdom meanings. Every time you read a parable, you have to figure out where you fit in the story. What is Jesus saying to me? Which character am I? This is one of the easier parables to identify who you are in the story and who I am in the story. It's far easier to identify because what we're going to see is the settling of accounts.

Where going to see Jesus using this idea of debt and debts being paid back and how you and I have had this great debt forgiven by God because of the work of Christ Jesus on the cross for us. And yet, we turn around and look at people and say, "I can't forgive that." I was going to say to try and find yourself in the story. I'm just going to tell you who you are in the story as we read through it.

Matthew 18 – **23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like..."** That's how you know it's a parable, and we are going to get a story, a great story that teaches us and explains to us, convicts us of our sin, and what needs to change in our life. **"...a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him."** Here's really what you need to know. Whatever your translation uses for the debt there, the settlement there, the money there, just write in your Bible, "impossible to pay," "too great an amount to pay," "Large amount." **25 "Since he was not able to pay..."** By the way, that's you and I – not able to pay. **"...the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."**

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." That's you and that's me. Our heavenly Father, because of the work of Christ Jesus, has canceled our debt. Now, what do we do in understanding that and recognizing that and walking in that? Well, understand, believers in Christ Jesus, we are not debt collectors. It is not our job to walk around and collect debts that people owe us. Again, keep the word picture here. Someone sins against us, it is not our job to go make them pay. Watch what happens with this one who has had this great debt forgiven.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins." A manageable amount. An amount that could be repaid. "He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded."

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' " So, someone is saying exactly to him what he said to the king.

30 "But he refused." Let's pause right there. We are demanding something from people that has been forgiven in us by our heavenly Father. We refuse to forgive them. We want them to pay. "Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened."

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had

on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed."

In Verse 35, we going to get a warning of discipline. ***35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."***

It's like this whole parable is summed up in one line in the Lord's prayer. Jesus sums it up this way in Matthew 6, ***12 "And forgive us our debts..."*** That's us praying to our heavenly Father. Forgive us our debts. Forgive us our transgressions. Forgive us our sin ***"...as we also have forgiven our debtors."*** Forgive us and we forgive others. But how many of us can sit in worship service after worship service after worship service, sing praises to our heavenly Father for how forgiven we are and how he has cared for us and how he didn't cancel us; he canceled our certificate of debt, but he didn't cancel us. We are forgiven and we are reconciled to the Father. And then we leave here, not even gone 30 minutes praising our Father for that, before we are holding a grudge and demanding repayment from someone else, wanting them to hurt.

This is why... You hear pastors say this a lot like "I need this message more than anyone." A lot of times, they are lying. That's not true. It's a preacher thing you learn in seminary. They use it too much. That's why I don't use it; you need it more than I do. No... I'm just kidding. I know I need everything.

I've really been struggling with this because I have not been kind in cancel culture. I have a friend right now who is an author. Another author just feels like this author is trying to cancel this person and it's infuriating. I am sticking up... This person is older than I am, and she goes, "You're kind of acting like an older brother to me; defending me and protecting me." I go, "It's just not right!" This is what Rene talked about last week. It's our job. It's not right. We're going to fix this and we're going to fix it now. I'm taking her down to China Town. We're going to take this thing out, right?

That's where I'm at though. I'm frustrated, I'm mad, I'm angry. She's been the one getting the cancel and the venom and all that coming at her. And she's the one coming back to me with, "Ted, kindness. This isn't how we act. Just calm down, settle down, don't poke the bear."

I'll be honest with you. I love poking the bear. I love poking the bear. I love stirring it up. Amy and I get into conflict, right? I typically withdraw. That's what's funny. When it comes to fight or flight, Amy is fight and I'm flight. I withdraw and she escalates. I like to get out of the room, but I like to stir it up a little bit before I get out of the room, then I get out of the room as quickly as possible.

I know we're all dealing with this. I have to show kindness in the midst of people wanting to cancel other people. And when cancel culture finds its way into the church – people canceling people... That's a song right there isn't it."

This week, my son got his Driver's License. He talks to Siri all the time. He was trying to get directions to the license place. He said these words into Siri, and I had a moment. He said, "Take Me to Cracker Barrel." I go, "You just wrote a country song right there. I can't believe that country song hasn't been written yet."

Carson and I were driving down the road talking about this and I'm just saying... His generation has a very different opinion of all of this because he's watching his dad deal with this. Whenever my kids call me not dad but "Pastor Ted," I know exactly what they're saying. They're saying, "We're watching this. Do you want us to film this for the congregation? Do you want them to see what you're saying about this person from Iowa in front of you right now? Do you want them to see that? I wish I would have gotten that horn honk on tape." See... that's even my... on tape! On TikiTok or whatever. We're going off the rails here, people, we gotta get focused here. We've got a few more things to say.

A great article this week. Frank Viola wrote this article on kindness: *The Forgotten Christian Virtue*. He said this... and I think sometimes the younger generation is looking at the older generation in the church. Rene was talking about how we enter act with the culture, but how do we interact with each other as well? He said, "*Christians have a reputation for being judgmental, self-righteous, hateful, and mean spirited in the eyes of many unbelievers.*" Yeah, I don't want it. That's why I sat down there in Rene's talk... Three talks last week – convicted. Yes, he's right, he's right. I'm not going to be a part of the outrage. I'm not going to participate; I'm going to back away from it. He goes on to say, "*The gospel calls us to be redemptive voices...*" There's that tongue bringing life "*...to that which is broken.*" Not participants in it, bringing death to more people, death to organizations, death to businesses. I want nothing to do with it. He goes on and breaks it down. I wish I could give you the whole article.

He said, "**Kindness is not a random act.** We say that – "Random acts of kindness." But doing something nice, paying for someone's coffee that you don't know, let's just be honest; that's pretty easy. They haven't wronged us, they haven't done anything. Being kind to someone who has wronged you, being kind to someone who is trying to take you out, that's very different.

Kindness is fierce, brave, and daring. He said, "Don't teach your kids anymore to be nice; teach them to be kind." **Niceness is kindness minus conviction.** We know who we are

Kindness is a call to sacrifice, to embrace discomfort, and to put action behind our words.

So, what conversations will you enter into this week? Colossians 4 gives us a great understanding of bringing life to our conversations, bringing life to our posts, bringing life to our comments and our remarks and our little jabs, bring kindness to those moments. **5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

I just want to leave you with two practical ways that we can do this, and these are ways that I've tried to practice. I'm not posting as much online because I can't, because of this one right here - **Restrain your words when they are true and necessary but not kind.** I have a lot of things to say. I do. I have a lot of opinions. I don't know of you know that. I have a lot of opinions. And I'm usually 99.9% correct. If you would just think like me and vote like me and do everything. And it's necessary. Rene really hit that one last week, right? We've got to stand up. I know my friend in here. You're like, "I know what happened in the 2020 election, and, doggone it, I'm going to do something about it. I'm right and I got proof. And I'm going to save our democracy! You're forgetting Kindness. Don't forget this one. Be kind.

Scripture says it this way in Proverbs 17 - **27 The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.** Some of you are going, “You should really meditate on that verse this week, Ted.” **28 Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.**

Practice that this week. I don't know who said it originally, but you don't have to show up to every fight you're invited to, your like, “But someone has to stand up for the cause.” Or not. Just restrain your words. Or back space, back space, back space, delete until it's true, necessary, and kind. That's why I haven't been posting. I haven't been able to really nail that last one. Because it can be sharp. We all know this.

And if you are ready to speak, **use words that give life, not death.** Proverbs 16: 24 reads, **Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy to the body.** I love this because kind words help us physically. You can literally help yourself and others by the way that you speak, and the life that you bring. That's why when you leave today, you're going to get a honey stick with this card. It's got Proverbs 16: 24 on it. On the back you can write a note that you know you need to write. It's time to just practice it a little bit. You keep the honey stick in your Bible or somewhere close to remember to pray for the person you sent the kind words to.

Maybe there's just no agenda at all; you're just sending a kind word, encouraging someone. Because you know this... And Rene talked about this last week. There is so much still lingering after the pandemic. People are catching up, people are quitting jobs that they're being asked to come back to because they just want to stay home. There are people dealing with anxiety and depression and how do we enter back into social life and learn to smile again. People are dealing with really hard stuff.

Scripture says this: “Anxiety weighs down the heart.” Look for the person who is weighed down this week. Speak a kind word to cheer them up. Simple, easy, quick way to bring life. May we never cancel people because Jesus canceled our debt. May we be people, may we be followers of Jesus who speak life. And I'm asking the Lord, “Use this.” Rene's message has been a sacred echo all week for me. That we would take the word of God today, apply it and run with it in our lives. Be sure to grab this on your way out.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for how you continue to work in us and through us. I ask, for me and I know countless others, that you calm us down when it seems that every day, we have a new example of this. That we would speak what's true, necessary, and kind. That we wouldn't miss that *kind* piece. Then we just learn restraint. We want to be wise in the way we enter conversations so let our conversations this week be gracious and attractive to those and not adding to the outrage and fueling the outrage.

I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today their certificate of debt would be taken care of by the cross. That they would repent of their sins, believe Jesus is Lord, and that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.