Cancel Culture

July 19, 2020

*Matthew 5:43-48*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Are you familiar with the term ‘cancel culture’? It refers to the act of boycotting or unfollowing a popular figure who was found to have done or said something inhumane. For example, in very unspecified terms, if a certain singer was found to have been a part of a crime in his or her past, people would stop listening to their music to show that they are not supportive of that crime or that person.

Cancel culture makes sense on that level – however, it has grown to become something that we too easily fall into. Now, it doesn’t have to be celebrities or popular figures, it can be anybody. Our social media “friends”, bosses, our teachers, a restaurant, if something says or does something we disagree with, all we have to do is click a button and “unfollow” or “unfriend” them, and we don’t have to deal with it anymore.

With a society that personalizes everything for us, cancel culture has become super easy to participate in. We can easily align ourselves with people and businesses we agree with and delete from our lives those we disagree with. Here’s why that’s a problem: Christ calls us to the opposite in this passage found in Matthew 5:43-48. It’s a familiar passage to us – one that we’ve even discussed in youth group often. But the words can never lose their power to us as followers of Jesus.

Jesus often spoke against what seems logical and straightforward on the surface. On the surface, it makes sense for us to not show support for others who are doing something we believe is wrong. And I’m not saying that we shouldn’t ever disagree with others or take action against injustice. But simply deleting someone or something from our lives doesn’t always solve the problem. Jesus not only calls us to interact with those we disagree with, He calls us to LOVE them. He calls us to pray for them. He calls us to greet them, socialize with them, treat them as human beings. In doing this, we live more intentionally; we show grace, we make mistakes, and we learn from those mistakes. We also have the opportunity to speak Jesus into others instead of deleting them from our lives.

The Pharisees got in trouble with Jesus because they often tried to “cancel” people who didn’t agree with them or live by their standards. Jesus ate meals with those people instead, and showed want it meant to love them despite their messiness. It’s a difficult thing to do and can be a weird space to navigate, but it’s part of our calling as Christ-followers.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. Have you ever disagreed with someone – on anything? What is your natural first response? What actions can you take to form a different response?
2. Do you think there is ever a time where it is appropriate to completely “cancel” another person from your life? What is the difference between getting rid of a relationship you disagree with and getting rid of a relationship that is unhealthy?
3. Much of cancel culture happens in the online world. It’s not always appropriate to engage in conflict over social media, but what steps do you think you could take when you encounter something online that you don’t agree with?
4. This question may have been asked to you before (I can’t remember!!!): Do you think Jesus would have a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or any social media account if He were walking around today? If you don’t think so, why not? If you do think so, how do you think He would use it?
5. What do you think Jesus means in Matthew 5:48 when He says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect?”
6. What does it look like to love and pray for your friends? What does it look like to love and pray for your enemies? Should the two be different?