

6-13-21 Be God's Church in a Cancel Culture

Acts 15:6-35; Galatians 2.

Cancel Culture: the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure.

Censorship: the suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security:

Bullying: abuse and mistreatment of someone vulnerable by someone stronger, more powerful, etc.: the actions and behavior of a bully.

Can I say it is a crazy time to be alive? Everyday things seem to get more and more polarizing. I never thought I would see the day when the church, God's people would turn against each other. I remember hearing my pastor say, the church resembles the world more and more. The church is supposed to resemble God. We are the church, we are to resemble, look like... God!

I used to read or heard of distant churches turning on their leadership, but in many of those cases it was a doctrinal or teaching issue. Today, I personally know of some churches turning on their leadership. The reasons for it are crazy. Some are dealing with Covid-19 issues and fall out, including vaccination issues. Some are being raked over the coals because of what side they are or aren't on social injustices. Others are being persecuted for standing on God's side of sin. Sin's that the world deems acceptable.

Is this new? Nah, it looks to be gathering momentum or becoming more noticeable. But there is nothing new under the sun, according to **Ecclesiastes 1:9, "That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun."**

Paul warned Timothy and all the churches that were and will be of the craziness that lied ahead.

2 Timothy 3:1-7

With our current culture/society (USA) in a frenzy of wokeness, censorship, bullying and cancel culture, how do we avoid it happening inside OUR church?

The answers are found in the Word of God, God used Paul and his ministry to show us.

For weeks we have been talking about Paul and Barnabas' 1st missions' trip; 1200 miles, 700 by land, 500 by sea, and taking a 1.5 to 2 years to complete. Last week we spoke about some "certain men" Pharisees, false believers according to Paul that came into his sending church teaching a false doctrine.

The false doctrine was that a person must be circumcised, plus follow the law (613) and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior to be saved. We looked how Paul in his own words stated he didn't give it a second thought. Paul, Barnabas, and others were sent to the apostles and elders at the church in Jerusalem to clarify this false teaching. That is where we are today, before the apostles and elders.

Let's reread **Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 1-5** as a refresher of what Paul was dealing with.

How are we to deal with the censorship, bullying and cancel culture in the church body?

I. Be Willing to listen. (Verse 6)

- **Read verse 6. "...came together to consider this matter"**
- Warren Weirsbe in his commentary believes there was at least 4 different meetings to gather all the info. 1st a public welcome to Paul and his associates, Acts 15:4. 2nd a private meeting with Paul and key leaders, Galatians 2:2. 3rd a second public meeting at which the Judaizers presented their case, Acts 15:5-6. 4th the public discussion described in Acts 15:6.
- An effective way to learn is to listen. This is a huge issue in homes, jobs, churches, and in society today; we have lost the ability to listen. A running joke is that men don't listen when their wives speak... (I am guilty)
- Ladies are just as guilty as men. They may appear to be listening when really, they are just hearing. (Now I am asking for it!) There is a difference between hearing and listening.
- Stephen Covey wrote, *"the biggest problem about communication is that we do not listen to understand, but instead listen to reply."*
- We all know that one person who is a horrible listener. You know who they are, they come up and ask you a question and before you can respond or finish, they interrupt you or fire another question off.

Proverbs 18:13, "He who answers a matter before he hears it (the facts), It is folly and shame to him."

- Listening is hard work - it demands that we lay aside our thoughts for a moment and learn from someone else.
- Calvin Coolidge: *It takes a great man to be a good listener.*
- I think we could all be better listeners and not just hearers. With me when I am angry, frustrated, or emotional, I am not a good listener. I will fire off rapid questions, or accusations and not give any thought to what the other person is saying.
- You cannot listen if you are making accusations, that is the opposite of listening, that is assigning intent and often can lead to you creating your own narrative, a false belief.
- How much of what is being said today is being truly heard, listened to, to find a solution or common ground? Shouldn't we be looking for common ground?
- People in America don't want to try and listen to each other. (Nowhere!) Some have no intention of allowing others to be heard.
- I grew up believing and still do, you can learn something from everyone. If you spend time really listening, you will gain nuggets of wisdom. Sometimes wisdom is found in listening to them and making mental notes on what not to do.

- If you are like me, most of your thought about this point has been about others. “This is so true about so and so, or this politician, celebrity, or fill in the blank.” But this point is for all of us.
- Many unresolved issues in the church, our church, is because of a break down in listening. Which then leads to anger, frustration, emotions, and results in assigning intent (narrative) and ends with hatred, gossip, slander, and destroys unity.
- Many times, the whole situation is a result of a blatant disregard of God’s truths. God calls it sin and we want to justify or deflect and can result in the twisting of God’s Word.

James 1:19-20, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

- If want to make a difference in the lives of others, we need to get back to learning to listen.

II. Facts over Feelings. (Verses 7-9)

- **Read verses 7-9.**
- After some disputing...passionate exchanges, Peter stood up and presented some facts.
- **Fact #1 God chose Peter to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. “...you know God chose among us...by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the Word of the gospel and believe.”**
- No one in Jerusalem had the street cred, juice, reputation as Peter. Paul called Peter the apostle to the circumcised, the Jews. **(Galatians 2:7-8)**
- I wonder if the Pharisees were excited when Peter first stood up. Peter was known to flip flop a little. We can read that in **Galatians 2:11-14.**
- There was no argument on either side of the argument, Peter was chosen to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.
- **Fact #2 God knows man’s heart. Verse 8, “So God, who knows the heart...”**
- The Pharisee liked to think they knew the heart of man. Most of the time they lied to their own heart.
- We too might think we know someone’s heart, sometimes we might be right. But **ONLY** God fully knows every human’s heart.

1 Samuel 16:7, “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

- Many times, my heart has lied to me, how can I know someone else’s. We must remember:

Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

- Be willing to ask God to reveal your heart to you.

Psalms 26:2, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart."

- **Fact #3 God chose to give them the Holy Spirit. "...acknowledged them by giving the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us," (Verse 8b)**
- Peter didn't preach circumcision to the house of Cornelius, nor did God demand them to be circumcised.
- If God didn't demand circumcision and the Mosaic law to be added to the salvation of the Gentiles, how dare anyone add them now?
- **Fact #4 God doesn't play favorites. "...no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."**
- It is faith, not works, that saves. It is still the same today. Anyone can come to the foot of the cross of Jesus and be saved. It doesn't matter whether you have money or not, influence, culture, American, man or female, adult or child, God desires that ALL come.

Emotions can get in the way, but the truth and the facts cannot be changed by feelings. God can and will save anyone, it doesn't matter whether they feel worthy or not.