



It seems that the focus of 'cancel culture' and 'woke' is mostly about shunning & destroying anyone and anything that has or might offend with disregard for forbearance, forgiveness or reconciliation, and has little interest or in the possibility of overlooking even an unintentional or minor offense, or social slight.

According to a recent opinion piece in the Washington Post,

“Black America should stop forgiving white racists... forgiveness only perpetuates the cycle of attacks and abuse... forgiveness is overrated. It heals neither body or soul ...”

Bitterness and anger have led to endless destruction and violence, putting our culture into a downward spiral spinning out of control and historically that trajectory or path **has never ended well.**

Without forgiveness & mercy, there is no path toward recovery as people remain victims of consequences and loss forever.

If there is no possibility of forgiveness or pardon then there is also no possibility of healing toward wholeness, and that burden of resentment, the crushing weight of rancor will destroy any hope for living in peace within community.

Desmon Tutu,

who grew up under the horrors and injustice of Apartheid wrote,

“**without out forgiveness there is no future**”, and explained,

“The alternative to forgiveness in South Africa would have been the cycle of violence we saw in the Balkans after the breakup of Yugoslavia.”

**So how did our nation and culture get to be so polarized and bitter?**

I believe it's because we've abandoned and rejected even the possibility of forgiveness, reconciliation and forbearance, preferring revenge, retribution, rancor and angry hatred...  
... that any wrong or injustice that someone has done, even in the past justifies shaming them publicly so to destroy them completely.

**But the truth is, that's not how God would have us to live...**

... which is why in this church, I try so hard to keep our focus on God's gracious love and healing through Jesus Christ, and avoid the distraction of cultural and political divisiveness.

**We must not allow the world to set the agenda for the church of Jesus Christ.**

What binds us together as one, isn't our common language, race, income, nationality, politics, education or things like that. We're unified by faith because of our love, grace and hope in Christ, which calls us and equips us to embrace compassion and forgiveness, **since even those who are enemies or difficult are also our neighbors.**

**In striking contrast to the angry and snarling panther in the zoo,**

I also noticed a pretty and colorful little butterfly that was flittering about freely and lightly going in and out of the cage past the angry panther...

... seeming to exude with an easy and delightful pleasure  
of God's wonderful and abundantly blessed creation.

That butterfly serves as a metaphor for a life of grace and mercy,  
living in hope, trusting in the truth, purpose and promises of God,  
and therefore **at peace with our world and circumstances**.

God's love and promises, his mercy and grace that heals and saves us  
are way beyond this world's perspective and limitations,  
**and calls us to conduct our lives on the basis of that gospel.**

We don't live by appearances or the circumstances of this world,  
but by the love of Christ that affirms and guides our lives,  
to willingly surrender our right to pay back those who have harmed us.

In confidence we trust God, knowing whose we are, Psalm 100, vs. 3 & 5,

Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep  
of his pasture. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all  
generations.

That is really the same message and truth we read in Ephesians, vs. 3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us** in Christ with  
every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

He **chose us** in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in  
love.

He **destined us** for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure  
of his will.

The Ephesians passage we read builds upon that wonderful truth,  
that flows like a crashing-cascading waterfall of God's grace.  
In the Greek, it is one very long sentence with no punctuation,  
that goes on and on building its momentum along the way,  
as it describes incredible blessings we have in Christ.

Before you or I even existed, God had already chosen us,  
made his decision to love and to embrace us with grace,  
and to forgive our every fault, failure, mistake and sin.

He **chose and destined us** is the very heart and center of our theology.

To be destined, or 'pre-destination' does not in any way mean  
that some are created to be healed and saved by God's grace,  
while others were created intending for them damnation.

Actually chosen and destined means,  
that there has never been a time, before we were loved by God  
and in fact, that God already and always has loved us,  
even before God had created time, or any of us.

To be created is to be uniquely precious and loved by God.  
And to live, means that God's grace is a gift always present,  
and that **all** are loved and valued far more than we can imagine.

There has never been a time when God didn't love us  
and there will never be a time when God won't **still love us** ...

... and so we can live

**in constant joyful praise of God's glory and goodness-**

-- not as a snarling panther caged by our situation or trepidation,  
but free as a butterfly, to live in the delight of God's mercy.

God chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world,  
by grace, already a plan to heal and save his lost children...  
... like one lover saying to another, "you were always meant for me."

So whatever does lie ahead for us,  
God's plan and purpose are already there,  
and we are being prepared even today,  
to glorify God in whatever comes our way tomorrow.

The reason we are created, and the very purpose for our being,  
is in order to be recipients of God's love, mercy and blessings  
to follow the example of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ,  
to reflect that truth and forgiveness back out into the world,  
and to damaged people who are also loved and precious to the Lord God.

At times our problems & struggles in this world can feel overwhelming  
but God's steadfast perfection, power, wisdom and purpose  
are our firm foundation and absolute assurance and truth  
**that all will end up, exactly as the Lord intends...**

... providing a security and freedom, hope beyond our circumstances  
to live this life more like the butterfly than the panther,  
sustained by faith, trust & confidence in the promises of God.

**So what does that look like in this uncertain and troubled world?**

Back in October of 2006, a very dangerous and deranged man,  
broke into a one-room school house in Lancaster County, PA.,  
armed with an arsenal of deadly weapons, guns and knives.

For the next hour or so,  
he terrorized, then killed or wounded 10 little girls,  
before ending this vicious rampage  
by turning his gun on himself in suicide.

When the media reported on these events,  
the focus was shifted away from his shocking violence  
by the Amish community's response ----  
**--- of immediate and unfathomable forgiveness.**

It is true that on the same day as those horrific killings,  
the grieving parent of one of those young Amish victims  
visited the dead shooter's wife to offer words of comfort.  
And when her husband, who had brutalized the children was buried,  
75 of her Amish neighbors cared enough to attend his funeral.

10 days after the shooting, the school was demolished,  
grass and clover were planted returning the site to pasture ---

-- leaving nothing for reporters and tourists to visit,  
and nothing visible reminded for the grieving Amish community ...  
... **whose focus was on forgiveness and moving on together.**

The Amish community's response of such  
radical and authentic **Christ-like intentional forgiveness**  
absolutely mystified the media and the outside world ----  
**-- by reflecting the gracious and redeeming love of Jesus Christ,**  
proclaiming unequivocally the grace and gospel of Jesus Christ  
in a way nearly beyond human comprehension,  
and which faithfully lived out and exemplifies  
the verses from Ephesians that we read earlier.

Ephesians is about living inward & outward a new attitude & mindset.  
It is not adopting some new set of rules to follow,  
but how our Christian faith informs, guides and directs  
the way that we choose to live and love out into the world.

**When the Amish community**  
**freely forgave the perpetrator of such unspeakable evil,**  
**they proclaimed the truth and authenticity of the gospel,**  
**probably more effectively and more powerfully than**  
**even a 1000 pastors preaching from their pulpits.**

**The contribution that the Church of Jesus Christ could provide**  
**to our nation and culture floundering with divisive animosity,**  
**is the countercultural practice of forgiveness & forbearance.**

Following the example of Jesus of forgiving those crucifying him,  
we too must give up the desire to get even and crush opponents,  
or allow the rancor of this world to inhabit our hearts & minds.

Our call is to restrain the darkness of evil in our culture  
through gracious love, that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus,  
i.e. mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation and life in community,  
that reflects the healing power of compassion and forgiveness,  
as a gracious willingness to forgo revenge and resentment.

For example, two next-door neighbors got into a terrible feud  
over a waterway and inlet that ran between their two properties.  
The fight, threats and hard feelings were increasingly bitter  
and nasty as the years of struggle and strife went on and on.

By the time I arrived as the new pastor, their battle had become  
a subtle and ongoing resentment, always beneath the surface,  
that led to endless petty attempts at pay back & revenge.

One of the men told me years afterward, how after a sermon one time,  
he recognized that he could not claim to love and follow Jesus  
and still hold such hatred and resentment toward his neighbor.

So he prayed, then went over to talk with his embittered neighbor.

They got past their past by allowing reconciliation to happen.

**He allowed God's grace and reconciliation to flow through him.**

The Church, the forgiven people of God by grace and by faith,  
are equipped to be and to serve as a colony of God's coming Kingdom,  
as a foretaste of life together under the Lordship of Jesus.

**Forbearance, patience, mercy & forgiveness are a part of that ethic.**

To forgive is to give a perpetrator a gift they do not deserve,  
like the way Jesus heals & saves us though we don't deserve grace...

... as it's written in Ephesians, vs. 4:32 - 5:2

... *God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

My friends, that is our hope toward a just, fair and whole society,  
a good and healthy nation and culture doing life together in peace,  
able to forgive, reconcile and live together in community.