



UN  
CANCELED

FINDING MEANING AND PEACE  
IN A CULTURE OF ACCUSATIONS,  
SHAME, AND CONDEMNATION

PHIL ROBERTSON

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

UN  
CANCELED

ALSO BY PHIL ROBERTSON

*Happy, Happy, Happy*  
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*The Theft of America's Soul*  
*Jesus Politics*

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PHIL ROBERTSON



NELSON  
BOOKS

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*Uncanceled*

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*I dedicate this book to my fellow soldiers who wage war against falsehood and are attacked by the cancel culture world for speaking truth. I hope that by reading this book, you will be emboldened to calmly stand firm and continue to hold up the Son of God as the embodiment of truth. I pray that you will never waver on this because he has promised us victory over every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.*



# CONTENTS

<i>A Note to the Reader</i> . . . . .	ix
<i>Preface</i> . . . . .	xiii
<i>Introduction</i> . . . . .	xxi
Chapter 1: What Is Cancel Culture? . . . . .	1
Chapter 2: Where Did Cancel Culture Come From? . . . . .	21
Chapter 3: Who Participates in Cancel Culture? . . . . .	43
Chapter 4: Why Is Cancel Culture Happening?	61
Chapter 5: Who's the Boss? . . . . .	77
Chapter 6: There's a Vaccine for That! . . . . .	91
Chapter 7: Jesus Cancels Guilt and Shame . . . . .	101
Chapter 8: Check Your Passport . . . . .	111
Chapter 9: I Ain't Afraid of No Ghosts! . . . . .	123
Chapter 10: The Perfect GPS . . . . .	135
Chapter 11: Who Are You to Tell Me What to Do? . . . . .	147
<i>Conclusion: The Gospel: We Are Unashamed</i> . . . . .	167
<i>Notes</i> . . . . .	179
<i>About the Author</i> . . . . .	185



CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

Since, then, we know what it is to fear  
the Lord, we try to persuade others.

2 Corinthians 5:11



Cancel culture! What is that? To be honest with you, I had no clue what that meant the first time I heard it. But it didn't take me long to figure out I had been a victim of it long before it became a thing. And a thing it has become.

Simply put, cancel culture's goal is to embarrass, intimidate, or cause someone to lose something of value, such as a contract, a job, or corporate revenue, in order to force the target to change their behavior. This is the experience I described earlier when the media came after me to coerce me into retracting the Bible verse I quoted about homosexuality to the *GQ* reporter. When they tried to cancel me, it worked. Unfortunately for those who wanted me fired from *Duck Dynasty*, it only lasted about forty-eight hours or so. I never missed a beat. Others, sadly, are not so fortunate.

The attempt to silence people by canceling them is much more widespread and even more powerful today than it was then. An example of what I'm talking about is what happened to Drew Brees, the former quarterback of the New Orleans Saints. In early 2020, a reporter asked Brees's opinion of the players who kneeled during the playing of the national anthem. His response, which many considered patriotic, was that he would "never agree with anybody disrespecting the flag." Brees immediately came under attack. The cyberuniverse erupted in a frenzy of indignation from the mainstream media, other players, and social media's keyboard warriors. Brees caved a day later and offered the required apology.<sup>1</sup>

Author J. K. Rowling also had an encounter with cancel culture in June 2020. Devex posted an opinion piece with the headline “Creating a More Equal Post-COVID-19 World for People Who Menstruate.” The writers were trying to bring attention to the dangers women in developing countries faced during the pandemic. I assume they were trying to be sensitive to transgender people, so they did not use the word “women” in their article, even though biological women are the only ones who menstruate. Rowling sarcastically replied to the opinion piece on Twitter: “‘People who menstruate?’ I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?” Of course, she was pretending to search for the word *woman*.<sup>2</sup>

I don’t want to spend a lot of time talking about whether Rowling made a legitimate point or not. The point I want to make is that, even though Rowling has a reputation for being liberal in her political and social views, she was not immune to cancellation. In her case, the backlash on Twitter was enormous, even vicious. While she did have a few supporters, others reacted with hysteria and outrage. One user responded, “Aren’t you a children’s writer? Your fixation with the genitalia of strangers is unsettling.”<sup>3</sup> Another wrote, “Stop hating trans people you awful weirdo.”<sup>4</sup> Many Twitter users unsympathetically informed Rowling, “I hate you.”

The thing I find most disturbing about the attack on Rowling is that no one attempted to discuss the facts of her opinion. The cancel culture attacked her with the understanding “We don’t discuss. We don’t attempt to persuade! We destroy! That’s what we do!” I have a news flash for these people: simply telling folks to shut up doesn’t really change any minds. Cancel culture may be effective at forcing people into submission, but it does nothing

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

to persuade. In my humble opinion, people who respond with vulgarity (some of the responses to her tweet are too vulgar for me to repeat) and personal attacks indicate they aren't all that comfortable in their position. From where I sit, it looks as if they are afraid their point of view won't stand up to scrutiny.

Another celebrity who's taken it on the chin in recent years for allegedly going against the grain of the political and moral views of popular culture is the actor Chris Pratt. In spite of the fact that Pratt has never spoken publicly about his political views, Twitter users went after him when he didn't participate in a fundraiser for Joe Biden that was sponsored by his fellow Avengers actors. Some in Twitterland surmised, since he was absent from the event, he must be a Donald Trump supporter. Then he was attacked for attending what was described by his detractors as an "anti-LGBTQ" church, even though no one provided much evidence that it was true. When a Twitter poll was taken, where users were given the opportunity to eliminate one actor out of four named Chris, Pratt was the loser.<sup>5</sup>

Targeting celebrities for cancellation is one thing. Most of them can withstand any financial and professional hits their careers might take from the cancel culture. But what happens when this enraged crowd goes after regular folks? You know, people who work regular jobs for a living and often live paycheck to paycheck.

At the peak of the riots and unrest in the summer of 2020, a friend of a friend (I'll call him Bernard) was communicating on Facebook with a colleague who worked for the same nationally known corporation as he did. Bernard's colleague was sitting in her hotel room on the tenth floor and watching the violence unfold on the streets below in a midwestern city where she was attending a conference. The rioters were breaking windows,

entering private businesses, and attempting to breach the front door of the hotel that Bernard's friend was staying in. She posted a few pictures of the violence on her thread and commented that police snipers were stationed atop other buildings with rifles that fired rubber bullets. Bernard replied the police should direct a few rubber bullets toward the violent protesters and disperse the crowd because of the danger posed to the public.

Within a single hour both Bernard and his colleague were notified by their corporation's lawyers that their employment had been immediately terminated for their "insensitive" posts on social media.

*Boom!* In one hour, they had lost it all. Fired! Canceled!

Jack Phillips is an ordinary businessman who owns the Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado. But in 2012 he was thrust into the national spotlight in a way he never anticipated. A same-sex couple had wanted to hire Phillips to bake a wedding cake for their upcoming nuptials. When he refused to make a cake that celebrated a wedding he felt went against his religious beliefs, the couple sued him in court. Eventually, the case wound up in the Supreme Court, where the justices determined Jack was within his rights to refuse the couple's request.

One would think the radical LGBTQ community would get the message and simply leave the humble baker alone. If you thought that, you would be wrong. In 2017, on the day the Supreme Court agreed to hear Jack's case, he received a call from a customer who wanted a cake that would be blue on the outside and pink on the inside to celebrate the caller's transition from male to female. Once again Jack refused.

As I said, the state of Colorado and the LGBTQ community should have received a very clear message from their earlier interaction with the baker, but they didn't. Now he's back in court

defending his right to not promote anything he feels is against his beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

This is cancel culture. No free exchange of ideas. No respectful back-and-forth to arrive at a consensus. Just rip open your laptop or your iPhone and attack. Intimidate! Destroy! Overwhelm your opponents and bring them to their knees. Drew Brees and J. K. Rowling were punished for violating someone else's sensibilities. They said what these people did not want to hear. But they are wealthy celebrities, and they'll survive.

But what about Bernard and his colleague? What about Jack the baker? They aren't high-profile people. They are just hard-working folks trying to provide a decent life for their families. Yet they were canceled, too, and for them it was very costly. And for what? Did they commit acts of treason against the United States? Were they guilty of thievery? Had they sexually harassed their coworkers? Were they dealing drugs? No, it was nothing like that.

The sad truth is that, in the cases of Jack Phillips and Bernard and his colleague, the price they paid for stating their beliefs may have been more costly than the price I paid for quoting a Bible verse. I lost a few sponsorships; they lost their ability to make a living.

In the case of Bernard, the corporation he and his friend worked for failed to defend both common sense and freedom of speech. You may be wondering why the company caved so quickly and fired them. I'm not sure, but maybe the reason is that the corporation was afraid the players within the cancel culture would publicly shame the company for tolerating *offensive* and *hurtful* speech within their corporation. Until then, Bernard and his friend had both been top producers in the company. Now, they were out on the streets for one crime: they had exercised their First Amendment rights and violated an unknown and unwritten

company policy. The cancel culture crowd won when the company caved. Unfortunately, Bernard and his coworker were caught in the middle.

Perhaps you are wondering who these cancel culture warriors are. In the case of Bernard, the person who canceled him and his friend later posted on social media that he spends a great deal of his “workday” searching for “offensive” posts. His goal is to expose as many regular people’s “transgressions” as he can and publicly shame them. Apparently, there is a small army of folks like him who troll the cyberuniverse to do just what this young man did: to get people canceled. In my opinion, this is a miserable way to live, to spend your life looking through social media posts for something, for someone you can destroy. How sad!

Before we go any further, I think it’s important to point out it’s not just people on the Left who are canceling others out. Some evangelical Christians are pretty good at doing it too. In 2008, Rick Warren, the pastor of the California megachurch Saddleback, hosted the Civil Forum on the Presidency between the two presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain. Later, Obama asked Warren to deliver the prayer at his inauguration. Of course, many on the left side of the cultural spectrum attacked Obama’s choice of Warren to deliver the prayer, but many Christians also went after Warren for his association with Obama’s inauguration.

I’ll admit I’m not the most subtle man to ever live, nor am I all that familiar with thinking about the optics of a move such as Warren made. But the way I figure it, even if Bubba asks me to pray at closing time at the local redneck juke joint, I’ll jump at the chance. What better opportunity to go before the Father and proclaim his name in the presence of the people who need him more than they know? Perhaps the evangelical naysayers hadn’t

considered the opportunity that Warren's prayer in front of the nation presented before they attempted to cancel him.

### **Shades of Cancel Culture in Christians**

I want you to contrast how cancel culture tries to coerce folks to submit to an agenda with how mature believers attempt to spread their message. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to *persuade* others" (emphasis added). In my younger days as a Christian, my goal was to back people into a corner and intimidate them into baptism. As I grew in maturity, though, I realized the real power is in the message, not the messenger. Coercive or heavy-handed preaching may have resulted in a boatload of conversions, but I had misunderstood my role in leading others to Jesus.

Today? Well, I'm still very passionate about speaking the name of Jesus into the hearts and minds of people who are messed up in the same way I once was. Now, however, I am more about persuading. I want to make an appeal that gives people an opportunity to change their minds about the direction of their lives. I want them to make up their own minds and approach God with the full confidence that he will accept them and that he loved them while they were still enemies with him (Rom. 5:6–8). I want them to be fully persuaded that the sacrifice of Christ is all the proof they'll ever need to know how much he loves them. But no matter how passionate I am about others putting on Christ, I decided years ago I would not use coercion and intimidation to "get people in the water." I guess you could say I abandoned cancel culture tactics long before cancel culture became known as cancel culture.

## UNCANCELED

I also decided years ago that I would handle disagreements the way God told me to handle them. Jesus said, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over” (Matt. 18:15). You may think I’m a bit naive here, but the way I figure it, the simplest approach is to handle it in God’s way. I never go wrong when I listen to the Spirit of God. I’ve noticed that people who do the opposite of what Jesus said in this passage have a cloud of chaos and disorder trailing behind them everywhere they go. We’ve always had people who take their disagreements to the streets and announce them publicly, and usually they were trying to cancel another person, to convince others to side with them and shun the person with whom they disagree.

As I said earlier, it’s not just people of the world who publicly attack their opponents. In the months leading up to the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention, Twitter and other social media platforms erupted with Baptists attacking one another over issues such as critical race theory, women preaching, sexual abuse cover-ups, and social justice issues. I wondered at the time what would have happened if the parties involved had first obeyed Matthew 18:15. I’m assuming some of those involved had already attempted to sit down with one another and open the Book and pray for God’s guidance. But I suspect few of them did, judging by their language in the exchanges.

I don’t want to repeat their comments here, but many were reproduced in a June 12, 2021, *Washington Post* article titled “Secret Recordings, Leaked Letters: Explosive Secrets Rocking the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>7</sup> I’m not in the inner circle of the Southern Baptist Convention, but this sounds more like Washington, DC, than it does the representatives of the bride of Christ, the church of God. The article quoted several prominent

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

church leaders who had publicly blasted one another on a variety of issues. Publicly! Jesus followers ripping one another publicly to cancel the influence of the other. I'm just an average man, but I am certain Christ is not glorified in this. Not even a little bit.

I'm saddened by all of this, but I'm not shocked. I wasn't around in the first century, but from what I've read in the New Testament and from what I've observed about human nature, attempting to cancel others is as old as the hills, even among Christians. This is what Paul was referring to in Philippians 1:15–17: “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.” Those who were attacking him also preached Jesus, but they were perverting the message of the gospel in an effort to neutralize Paul's influence.

Of course, the ultimate attempt to cancel was how the power brokers in the Jewish religious institution orchestrated the murder of Christ. They were religious leaders too. When the chief priests and the Sanhedrin stirred up the hastily assembled crowd, they began to parade a slew of witnesses to bring a string of false accusations against the Lord. When nothing worked, they said, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple *made with human hands* and in three days will build another, not made with hands” (Mark 14:58, emphasis added).

You may not be familiar with this tactic of the chief priests, but it's an old one. Take a little truth and tweak it a bit to make your accusation stick. In this case, Jesus had said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19). The problem is, he wasn't referring to Solomon's temple but to his body, foretelling his resurrection from the grave. They simply

added the words “made with human hands,” which made it sound as if Jesus had said something he neither said nor meant to say.

There was no social media in the first century, but that didn’t prevent the cancel culture from doing its thing. Unfortunately, people now have the platform of social media, which makes their gossip and slander much more dangerous because it’s so much easier to execute. Gossip and half-truths can travel around the globe in less than a second. It must have taken the Jewish leaders a couple of hours to assemble their crowd; now it could be done almost instantaneously.

Make no mistake about it, intimidation and the fear of cancellation is a powerful strategy. The average American is walking on eggshells, trying to avoid breaking the cardinal rule of the cancel culture religion: *Be kind! Don’t offend! Don’t judge! Tolerate!*

Maybe you are wondering, what’s wrong with that? These are attributes we should all strive for, right? They are, after all, the “fruit of the Spirit.” I agree. I strive to be kind, but cancel culture is not actually interested in *all of us* being kind, loving, and non-judgmental. If you don’t believe me, just break a rule. One time. Just violate their mandate and speak out against something they want to promote. You will find they themselves are not all that committed to kindness. Ask J. K. Rowling and Drew Brees. Ask Bernard and Jack Phillips.

Even though the rule is to be kind, loving, and nonjudgmental, it doesn’t always apply because there is a hidden exception to the rule: you are permitted to be unloving, unkind, and judgmental if you are calling out someone *you* decide isn’t loving, kind, and nonjudgmental. Then you can hate and judge all you want to. But other than that, there are no exceptions.

Some people who participate in cancel culture probably believe they’re engaging in discussion and may also believe they

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

are directed by God to share their opinion. But I've noticed we rarely find ourselves engaged in a free exchange of ideas. That's because what cancel culture is really after is a good old-fashioned beatdown of anyone who crosses the line. It's about emotional manipulation that is designed to force people into submission. In the dangerous game of cancel culture, there are no winners because no one ever knows what the real rules are. No one knows what can be offensive or not. For example, I'm told that kids have been playing with Mr. Potato Head since it first came to the toy stores in 1952. But in 2020 critics began to argue that the gender-specific Mr. Potato Head reinforced hurtful gender stereotypes and could cause children who identified as nontraditional genders to feel left out. So Hasbro, the company that owns Mr. Potato Head, made the "bold" decision to remove the "Mr." from all future packaging, and Mr. Potato Head would hereafter be known as simply Potato Head. I guess transitioning from one gender to another or to no gender at all is now mainstream. Even Mr. Potato Head is doing it. I'm sure we are all better off, right?

The problem with this shifting cultural landscape is that none of us ever knows what the next offensive trigger point might be. One day it was Mr. Potato Head, and the next it was Dr. Seuss perpetuating hurtful stereotypes. I'm just a simple guy, but even I can figure out that nothing good will come of this. One day Mr. Potato Head is a funny toy that allows kids to be creative by changing his appearance, and the next day he is a symbol of everything that is wrong in America. I'm pretty sure that no kid ever said to himself, "This toy offends me and causes me to feel marginalized."

The story here is that you can be innocent one day only to be guilty of the most heinous cultural offense the next. In a world like that, you never know where you stand. No one can live up

to that standard. No one. Not even the people who participate in cancel culture can.

Let me give you an example of this. In 2021, celebrity Chrissy Teigen shared a lengthy apology for publicly shaming and canceling other celebrities. I read her apology, and I think she seems sincere enough. In my world, when someone tells me they are sorry for wronging me, I'm like, "Hey, it's no big deal." In fact, I make it a practice to forgive folks before they ask. That way I'm not walking through life carrying a boatload of hurt feelings. But fashion designer Michael Costello responded in a since-deleted Instagram post that Teigen's bullying had caused him years of grief: "For the past 7 years, I've lived with a deep unhealed trauma. I wanted to kill myself and I am still traumatized, depressed and have thoughts of suicide."<sup>8</sup>

But hold on a second! As soon as Costello published his response, singer Leona Lewis claimed that Costello had body-shamed her at a 2014 charity event. Did you get that? Costello claimed that Teigen hurt his feelings with her cyberbullying, and then Lewis claimed Costello had hurt her feelings in 2014.<sup>9</sup>

I'll admit I'm not someone who wears my feelings on my sleeve, so all of this drama is foreign to me. But the point I want to make is that once we go down the road of calling others out in public while demanding fair treatment for ourselves, we are going to wind up in hot water for being guilty of the same thing. Guilty party number one calls out guilty party number two for causing public shame only to have guilty party number three remind guilty party number two that he or she is guilty of the same thing. If your head is spinning, join the crowd. This isn't a sustainable way to live. Everyone winds up getting burned because everyone falls short—all of us are guilty of saying things we shouldn't say or being insensitive to the feelings of others.

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

Is any of this fair? Well, no, it isn't. But I don't want to waste a lot of time thinking about what is fair. If we are going to wait until things are fair, we will be a very frustrated group of individuals. I choose to forgo the right to have things fair. Besides, if I demand fairness, then God would do the fair thing: he would destroy me for my crime of rebellion against him. Instead of fairness, I'm far more concerned about making sure I introduce God into my interactions with folks who practice cancel culture. And I want to do that in a way that accurately reflects who he really is. That's why I wrote this book; I want to give a biblical view of Christ. My goal is to convince you and others (including the PC cancel culture crowd) that the only way anyone is going to find meaning and fulfillment in life is to seek the God who is real, to pursue the one who died for us and was raised from the dead on our behalf. Instead of political correctness, I'm all about biblical correctness. That's the only thing that concerns me, because at the end of the day, I'll not stand before you or any other person to account for how I lived my life. No, I will only stand before the Almighty, because he alone has the right and the authority to hold me accountable. The same is true for you. So getting fair treatment from other people is the last thing on my mind. I seek to please the one who is infinitely fair. Thankfully, he is full of grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

My goal, and I would suggest you think about making it yours too, is not to destroy the people in the cancel culture movement. That job is way above my pay grade. Instead, I'm focused on one thing: I want to understand what this crowd is up to because I want to be ready to "give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). I understand that this bunch has experienced an adrenaline rush of power, and their next step will be to grab a little more. But I do

## UNCANCELED

not want to respond in the same way they do, with anger, hatred, bitterness, and control. I'm not out to destroy them just because I disagree with them. I want to have a meaningful, respectful conversation with them instead. I want to persuade them that God is real and that we can trust him.

While it's true I detest the practices of cancel culture, as a follower of Christ, I have to be careful that I am not guilty of doing what they do. I don't want to treat them the same way they treat me. I want to do things the way God has instructed me to do them. That's because I want to be obedient to God, not cause anyone to slander his name because of me. Since I'm committed to being as Christlike as possible (because of what he's done for me), I am also committed to running my response to cancel culture through the only reliable filter I know. I want to make sure that I'm handling it *his* way, and this is how he said to respond to opposition:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24–28)

Cancel culture is not about a specific person or even a group of people; it's an idea that caught a stiff breeze and was fanned into flames by people who are confused about what is right and good. And why wouldn't they be? I'll repeatedly make the point that without a firm faith in a transcendent God, who alone has the authority to determine what is right, we are basically on our own.

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

Without God, we are adrift on the sea of life without any sense of direction. Yes, *confusion* is the word I would use to describe the minds of those who don't know God. As a matter of fact, I remember the confused life I lived before the Almighty got hold of me. And if there's one thing I know about confused people, it's that they have no idea there is a God who offers to give their minds clarity. God is not the source of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), but there is one who does love confusion: the "father of lies," the Evil One (John 8:44). He loves to muddy the waters. He loves to muddle our minds with bad ideas and half-truths. That's why I'm not into attacking those who attack me. I am much more interested in attacking the ideas that confuse us than I am in attacking any person or group of people. As you can see in the verse above, treating our opponents with kindness and respect is a very biblical idea. This is why I make every attempt to *gently* instruct folks; since I'm working for the Almighty, I also want them to come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, just as I did.

Trust me when I tell you I understand the temptation to respond by attacking this crowd. I am certainly not saying my track record is perfect on this, but the gentle instructive response is my goal because that is how the Almighty has instructed me to respond. I'm pretty sure he knows more about the best way to react than I.

Yes, it's a war zone out there for sure, but our opponents are not actually the media nor cancel culture nor the radical Left nor the radical Right. In fact, our opposition is not a person at all. Satan is definitely our enemy. We are at war with *his* deadly ideas that have established a stronghold in the minds of unsuspecting and ignorant people. In response to that, we are firing our spiritual AR-15s at arguments that distort the reality about God and other people.

People don't get killed in the war that God has called us to fight, at least not by us. Rather, we are all about freeing them from the lies that distort minds and destroy lives. We aren't a plundering, murdering horde engaged in a relentless battle to bring a gruesome, bloody war into the streets. Other people may wage war with the intention of destroying others, but not us. Instead, we are liberators because our goal is to bring freedom in Christ, freedom from deadly thoughts that stand in opposition to the knowledge of God. Yes, we fight, but we don't fight as they fight:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

Do you see the difference? One person battles against personalities, but the wise and godly person wages war against falsehoods because those ideas will end badly for anyone who embraces them. One destroys people while the other seeks to destroy destructive thinking that is not rooted in reality. Rather than forcing people to submit to us by exercising our raw power, we are persuading people to embrace freedom from bondage.

At this point, you might ask, "Phil, how would we know which ideas need to be attacked and destroyed?"

I would say, based on the passage above, that a bad idea is one that sets itself up against the truth about God. Any idea that leads us to put our hope and trust in anything other than the gospel of Christ must be attacked. Any idea that deceives people with false hope and leads to bondage has to go.

## WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

I want to encourage you to fight the good fight against the real enemy! Don't get confused about who that is. Identify your opponent and fight him relentlessly! Fight using the weapons God has given you, and fight with passion! You may be canceled in the process, but don't worry, it's only temporary. In the meantime, you are in possession of the one thing that will last forever—immortality! No one can cancel that.

