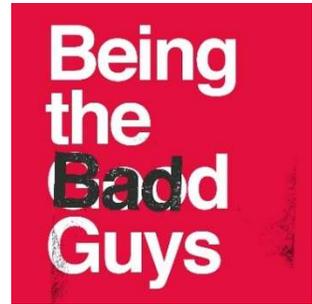


Week 3: Loud Power vs. Voiceless Victims

NCAC Adult Sunday School

October 3, 2021



Key Resource: *Being the Bad Guys: How to live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't* by Stephen McAlpine (The Good Book Company, 2021)

Overall Course Goal: *"This book isn't about how to stop being the bad guys; it's about how to be the bad guys. It's about how to be the best bad guy you can be—to refuse to be surprised, confused, despairing and mad about it, and to find a way to be calm, clear-sighted, confident and even joyful in it."* (Bad Guys, p. 11)

WHAT WE'VE COVERED SO FAR:

- Over the past several decades Christianity has moved from being generally seen as a force for good to being something that was tolerated to being seen as wrong and even dangerous.
- This trend has its roots in the Enlightenment (when tradition became more broadly questioned) and the Romantic Era (when each individual's feeling became his or her standard for how to live).
- Today the world celebrates a new religion built on commitment to individual autonomy and celebration of personal authenticity at any cost. Ultimate meaning is now found in the self.
- A core component of this new secular religion is gender identity, which is viewed as separate from sex assigned at birth. The world now recognizes a wide variety of gender identities.
- The Bible's view of gender, in which God created just two genders (male and female), is thus seen as wrong and dangerous, having led to centuries of abuse and damaging restraint.
- As Christians, we've been given a message of good news that we must share with the world, but we must remember our engagement with the world should be characterized by love and grace.

Today's Class Goals: *Loud Power vs. Voiceless Victims*

- What's happening in our culture: Two competing narratives
- So, is the church the victim or the perpetrator?
- How should we move forward from here?

What does the Bible teach about oppressing others?

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.'" (Zechariah 7:9-10, ESV)

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless: maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. (Psalm 82:3, ESV)

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR CULTURE: TWO COMPETING NARRATIVES

What are some signs that Christianity has held or does have sway in our nation, state or community?

What are some signs that Christianity is losing sway in our nation, state or community?

“Two narratives that are each incompatible [are in a death grip with each other in the West]. And, ironically, both are laying claims to victimhood.

“The first narrative is about how the secular culture is riding roughshod over believers and church institutions, relegating them to the margins. This narrative tells Christians that they are right to feel hurt by the changes in popular assumptions about what leads to human flourishing, and urges them to fight back in whatever way they can.

“The second narrative comes from the secular point of view and is about the abuse of power which has led to trauma for so many people: from the covering up of sex scandals to the active repression of homosexuals, single mothers, and other vulnerable groups.” (Bad Guys, pp. 63-64)

Why do people often want to be seen as the victim?

“You’re either a victim or a perpetrator, says intersectionality ideology—and who wants to be a perpetrator, right? Individuals are encouraged to capitalize on an identity of victimhood to protect themselves from cultural criticism. New victim groupings are identified on a regular basis and people are rushing to sign up and make ‘victim’ their primary identity.

“Those who play at the card table of identity politics constantly search for the trump card that will grant them an elevated victim status and therefore place them beyond criticism by others, ushering in privileges hitherto held from them. Christians should not play this game.” (Bad Guys, pp. 64-65)

IS THE CHURCH THE VICTIM?

“...the conviction that Christianity is an increasingly powerless victim is one that has occupied the minds, books and blogs of many a Christian over the past two decades. It is believed that there is a concerted campaign by powerful figures who hate Christianity to marginalize and silence Christians. The secular framework in the West, so this story goes, is hostile to Christianity and has a vested interest in its decline.” (Bad Guys, p. 66)

What are some ways this narrative is true?

What happens if we buy into this narrative?

Christian persecution in the US cannot compare to Christian persecution in many other countries. Should this difference matter to us? Why or why not?

IS THE CHURCH THE PERPETRATOR?

“The other narrative states that, rather than being the victim, the church has been a power-abuser, and a powerful one, for too long. It is now experiencing its comeuppance. The progressive secular world is sloughing off its malign influence, leading us on to a brighter future devoid of dogma.” (Bad Guys, p. 67)

In what ways is this narrative true?

“The story that evangelicals are (merely) victims of progressive aggressors not only fails to account for the ways in which the LGBT movement was shaped by populist evangelical rhetoric and tactics. It also forgets that the gay liberation movement was a direct response to the systemic and pervasive exclusion of lesbian and gay individuals from the structures of our public life—including from America itself....

“In the 1940s and '50s, gays and lesbians who worked in government were not given security clearances. They were barred from being teachers in some states and also faced the risk of losing their licenses to be doctors, lawyers, or even beauticians for engaging in same-sex sex acts. They were even denied entry to the country by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 because they were alleged to have been ‘afflicted with psychopathic personality’....

“By adopting a perfectionist, populist politics that often demeaned and disrespected our LGBT neighbors, we evangelicals helped create the conditions for our own social marginalization....A democratic order cannot survive unless its citizens are willing to accommodate each other....

“Mercy is an evangelical virtue. It is grounded ultimately within the free and lavish grace of God, who can forgive debts and sins while suffering no harm or loss. Yet evangelicals’ politics have rarely embodied it. We have often used the law to eradicate vices. We now find ourselves in a position where progressive LGBT activists must decide whether to treat us better than we once treated them by extending recognition through

protections that they were once denied.” (“How We Got to the Equality Act,” Matthew Lee Anderson in Christianity Today, April 20, 2021)

So, what can we can learn from this example?

Should it matter to us that some of the wrongs done by the Church have been done by other Christians and not by us? Why or why not?

SO, WHICH IS TRUE?

As McAlpine says, there is truth in both narratives: “Has the church been aligned to power too closely, ignoring the very voices that Jesus himself would have listened to? For sure. That seems beyond doubt. The Bible is vociferous against the sinful tendency of God’s people to align themselves to power and to oppress the weak...But have Christians experienced an almost rabid hostility from an implacable secularism bent on removing their voices from the public square? This too seems obvious.” (Bad Guys, p. 69)

While there may be ways in which Christians are victims, why is it unhelpful for Christians to think of ourselves as victims?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12, ESV)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21-23, ESV)

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:15-17, ESV)

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:19, ESV)

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:17-19, ESV)

HOW SHOULD WE MOVE FORWARD?

“First, we should admit the reality of our failures...when we were not having our voices shut down in the public square, we often failed to speak up for the voiceless, powerless minorities...For many watching on...it seems rich of us to demand better treatment than we meted out, now that tables have been turned.” (Bad Guys, p. 71)

“Second, we should admit that we have a long way to go before we experience true hostility on a grand scale...The world is watching as we react to the pushback from hard secularism. And it simply isn’t buying our persecution claims or our cries that we are the victims.” (Bad Guys. p. 72)

“Third, we must admit that the Bible tells us that whoever wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted, and that those who do evil will increase (2 Timothy 3:12-13)...This is not to adopt a defeatist attitude about where our culture is drifting but to know that the common experience of many Christians down the centuries has been one not of power but of persecution.” (Bad Guys, p. 73)

And, “...we should plan for what will happen when rampant individualism starts to bear bitter fruit...When the actual victims of the culture start looking for grace and solace from its bruising brutality, we should make it easy for them to conclude that we have been the ones to provide that all along.” (Bad Guys, p. 74-75)

“Despite its triumph, the iWorld is not perfect. Two of the primary difficulties facing people in the iWorld are loneliness and insecurity. These are inherent by-products of individualism. If individual freedom is the goal and the means of achieving this freedom is replacing relationships of obligation and responsibility with a world of relational choice, then a certain amount of loneliness and insecurity will result.” (Dale Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld*, Baker, 2009)

What are your thoughts on this list? Any items you would disagree with? Anything you would add?

How does thinking of ourselves as victims in the culture war prevent us from doing what we ought to?

How can we best position ourselves for the evangelistic opportunities that could come our way as people begin to find emptiness in the path our culture is pursuing?