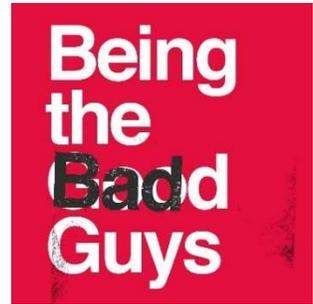


Week 1: How Did We Become the Bad Guys?

NCAC Adult Sunday School

September 19, 2021



How have you seen a change in the way our culture views Christians (or Christianity) over the past several decades?

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)

Also Recommended: *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman (Crossway, 2020)

The Problem: *"Only a few generations ago, Christianity was the good guy, the solution to what was bad. Rather than being on the wrong side of the law, we were the law. Christian morality was assumed and passed mainly unchallenged. The cultural, legal and political power structures affirmed Christians.*

"Then something changed. Over the course of the twentieth century, we became just one of the guys: one option among many—a voice to be considered but not to be followed unquestioningly. If Christianity worked for you, fine; if it didn't work for me, also fine.

"But the problem is that that's not where we are now. The tide has shifted further. Increasingly Christianity is viewed as the bad guy. Christianity is no longer an option; it's a problem.

"The cultural, political and legal guns that Christianity once held are now trained on us—and it's happened quickly... It's come as a surprise, we're not sure how it happened, we don't like it and we don't feel like we deserve it—but we are the bad guys now." (Bad Guys, pp. 10-11)

How do you feel about our current situation? Why?

When have God's people been "the bad guys" in the past?

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)*

Course Outline: For our course, we're going to basically follow the outline of "Being the Bad Guys":

Part 1: How Did We Become the Bad Guys?

- Why this sudden hostility?
- Why the surprise?

Part 2: What Does It Look Like to Be the Bad Guys?

- Sexuality: Binary Beige vs. Diverse Rainbows
- Victimhood: Loud Power vs. Voiceless Victims
- Authenticity: Self-Denial vs. Self-Actualization

Part 3: How Can We Be the Best Bad Guys Possible?

- A Strategy for the Church
- A Strategy for the Workplace

WHY THIS SUDDEN HOSTILITY?

Although it may feel as though the shift in Western culture has happened suddenly, both McAlpine (author of *Being the Bad Guys*) and Trueman (author of *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*) point to philosophers and political scientists who trace the roots of our modern "age of authenticity" back to the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, which arose in Europe several centuries ago.

During the **Enlightenment** of the late 17th to 18th century, many philosophers and scientists turned from what they considered to be an irrational emphasis on religion and tradition. They questioned existing structures, promoted the sciences, and pursued logical and rational reasoning. However, in time some began to feel reason had become so highly valued that life had lost its joy and passion.

Thus, **Romanticism** took over from the late 18th century into the mid-19th century. This period involved an emphasis on emotions, creativity, and freedom of expression. The arts, music, poetry, and other humanities were celebrated. Irrational impulses and subjectivity were accepted as a normal part of what it meant to be human, as seen in statements like "The artist's feeling is his law."

Though one era emphasized reason and the other emotion, both involved a rejection of tradition and taught that we can either find or create truth on our own, without the shackles of the past and often without any need for God. Thus, what we are experiencing today is "*not the sudden discovery of a new way of looking at the world. Rather, it is the final flowering of a view of humanity that began long before the word 'cisgender' ever made it to the humanities department of our universities.*" (Bad Guys, p. 21)

"[Romantic] Poets such as William Wordsworth and Lord Byron valued expressive individualism and a deep trust in one's emotional responses. It was untamed nature that they saw as authentic, contrasting it with the soul-destroying structures of modern life and institutions. In our own age, authenticity is defined by how true you are to yourself; not how true you are to your calling, or your community, or your covenant relationships, but to yourself." (Bad Guys, p. 21)

“Dale Kuehne has labeled the late modern West the ‘iWorld.’ In the traditional world, or ‘tWorld,’ our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world was discovered through ‘relationships of obligation.’ Society was held together by a recognition that family relationship structures and a commitment to maintaining them—sometimes at personal cost to the individual—was the pathway to flourishing. By contrast, the iWorld locates meaning and purpose within the individual, and relationships of obligation have been replaced by ‘relationships of choice.’ Our compass for who we are is not pointed outwards. We have become the source of meaning...and we only let people into our lives if they affirm and confirm our self-appointed True-North.” (Bad Guys, p. 20)

“A...useful element in Charles Taylor’s work...is the relationship between mimesis and poiesis. Put simply, these terms refer to two different ways of thinking about the world. A mimetic view regards the world as having a given meaning and thus sees human beings as required to discover that meaning and conform themselves to it. Poiesis, by way of contrast, sees the world as raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual.” (Modern Self, p. 39)

What features and values around sex and relationships do you think belong to these two worlds?

Traditional tWorld:

Modern iWorld:

How do these trends explain why Christianity is no longer welcome by many in today’s world?

If all this is true, what does that mean for us as we seek to live for Christ today?

While these trends might explain why our current culture views Christianity with hostility, we could still ask the question, “Why now?”

“The short answer is that massive technological progress is fast-tracking the age of authenticity. While the philosophical shifts have been underway for centuries, we have reached a tipping point today through the incredible transformations that digital technologies have brought to the world...Ideas that once took years to filter into the mainstream are conceived, birthed and implemented at breathtaking speed thanks to new forms of instant communication.” (Bad Guys, pp. 21-22)

IMPLICATIONS FOR EVANGELISM

Over the past few decades, many evangelists and missional leaders reasoned that even though fewer people in the West claimed to be Christian, Post-Modernism had now levelled the playing field. That is,

Christians often assumed unbelievers knew so little of Christianity that when it came to evangelism we were essentially starting with a “blank slate,” which would make evangelism easier. We thought a pure and simple Gospel, stripped of unnecessary institutionalism, could be presented and then examined without prejudice by a world anxious for some good news. We were wrong.

What we did not realize is we were *not* returning to a pre-Christian world, where the Gospel could be presented as something new. Rather, we are now in a post-Christian world. Our post-Christian culture has been inoculated against the Gospel, is hostile to the Gospel, and is “evangelistic” in its own sense.

“...what we are facing is a new religion—one built on commitment to individual autonomy and celebration of personal authenticity at any cost. It is a religion that finds ultimate meaning in the self, to counter the gospel that finds ultimate meaning in God and his King, Jesus Christ.” (Bad Guys, pp. 27-28)

If we are now living in a post-Christian world that starts resistant to the Gospel rather than a pre-Christian world that starts neutral to the Gospel, what are the implications as we share the Gospel?

WHY THE SURPRISE?

When famed Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton was looking to build a team for his polar expedition at the start of the 20th century, it is said that he placed the following ad in the newspaper:

“Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in event of success.”

Reportedly 5,000 men replied, all understanding upfront what they might be getting themselves into so they could not complain later on when things got tough.

If you were encouraging someone to consider the cost of following Jesus, what would you list as some challenges they might face?

If you were talking with someone about following Jesus, what are some benefits you might mention?

Stephen McAlpine points out that the Gospel has always involved a mentality of “suffer now, glory later,” though initially many of Jesus’ followers, such as Peter, did not understand this:

³¹ And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he

rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Mark 8:31-33)

Though later Peter did seem to get it:

[Peter and the other apostles] left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (Acts 5:41)

And Peter even later got to the point where he wanted others to understand:

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (1 Peter 4:12-16)

With regard to suffering as a Christian, what does Peter tell us we *should not do*? Why?

With regard to suffering as a Christian, what does Peter tell us we *should do*? Why?

Jesus said the world would hate us (John 15:18-19), but how do we know if the world hates us because we're Christians, and not just because we're rude, unnecessarily offensive, or just not very nice?

It's right to grieve over injustice in the world, it's right to pray for change, and it's right to labor to make the world a better place. But what does it mean if we do find ourselves “surprised, confused, despairing and mad” about being seen as the “bad guys” by the world?

“The Scriptures clearly hold out our ultimate hope—and the joy that accompanies it—in the return of the resurrected Jesus. His suffering is presented as the template for us to follow, knowing that suffering now will lead to glory later...Anger or outrage are sure signs that the future joy guaranteed to us has fallen off our radars as we are insulted or sidelined or scorned.” (Bad Guys, p. 40)

Homework: In the spirit of Shackleton's advertisement to join his expedition to the South Pole, if you were to write up an advertisement calling people to follow Jesus, what might you say?