

LIGHTS OUT! – PART 4

Take It By Force!

Isaiah 60:2 (KJV) - For, behold, the **darkness** shall cover the earth, and **gross darkness** the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

Matthew 5:14-16 (NKJV) - ¹⁴ “**You are the light of the world**. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ **Let your light so shine before men**, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 11:12-19 - ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the **kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force**. ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear! ¹⁶ “**But to what shall I liken this generation?** It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, ¹⁷ and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’ ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”

Beginning with the invasion of Poland in 1939, Nazi Germany had marched unchecked through most of the continent of Europe. By 1941, the Axis armies of Germany, Austria, and Italy had overrun Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France. Their only setback had come at the hands of Churchill’s tenacious Britain when Hitler’s ferocious bombing campaign of England failed to adequately soften the nation’s defenses and infrastructure enough to allow an invasion of the British Isles. Hitler and his Axis allies seemed well on their way to achieving the world domination for which they believed they were destined.

Then, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, finally brought the United States into the war. Gradually, and at tremendous cost, the tide began to turn. The forward momentum of the Axis powers was stopped. **(Pic of Pearl Harbor attack)**

But the Allies still needed to take back the territory lost on the continent of Europe. Thus, in 1944, American and British forces successfully invaded Italy at Anzio. It was followed five months later by the D-Day invasion at the beaches of Normandy, France. This invasion was depicted with horrifying accuracy by Steven Spielberg in his film Saving Private Ryan.

Using the hard-won beachhead established at Normandy, **the Allies began the slow, bloody work of pushing the Axis powers out of France —one village and farm at a time.** By August 25, 1944, Paris was liberated. By December, the Allies were in position to invade Germany herself. Thus,

for the very first time in the long war, **German armies faced the real prospect of having to fight to defend their own homeland.**

On a mid-December day in 1944, three powerful German armies plunge into the heavily forested Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg. Their goal is to reach the sea, trap four allied armies, and reverse the momentum of the war. (Put up Pic of Battle of Bulge)

Thinking the Ardennes Forest is the least likely spot for a German offensive, American Staff Commanders have chosen to keep the line thin, in order to concentrate manpower on expected attacks north and south of the Ardennes.

America's 106th Infantry Division, in place on a finger of territory jutting out into Germany, is hit with full force. After three days of battle, two of the Regiments, the 422nd and the 423rd, are surrounded. **The Battle of the Bulge is underway. And the fate of Europe turns on the outcome.**

Under the direction of General Dwight D. Eisenhower and General George S. Patton 1 million plus allied troops, including 500 thousand Americans, fought this ferocious battle. 19 thousand soldiers were killed, 47,500 were wounded and 23,000 plus missing. Over 100 thousand Germans were killed. However, it was this battle that broke the back of the Nazi war machine and allowed the allies to take back the territories that the Nazis had captured.

This brings us to that ferocious German counteroffensive mirrors the current phase of the "culture wars." For most of the last century, the forces of secularism and humanism enjoyed victory after victory. One by one, the primary institutions of our society fell to these philosophies.

Take the arts, for example. In the 1800s you had the great American painters of the Hudson River School creating majestic landscapes that they very consciously saw as reflections of God's glory manifest in His creation. Just a few decades later, we find Jackson Pollock randomly slinging paint at a large canvas and being celebrated as a genius. This steady degrading of art from meticulous and beautiful to random and chaotic was a direct outgrowth of the culture's embrace of Darwin's new evolutionary gospel of random chance.

We also lost the universities. Many of the most prestigious universities in America were founded by Christian men as distinctly Christian institutions. Harvard was founded in 1636 so the Puritans of the Massachusetts colony could train their own preachers and not have to depend on Oxford and Cambridge in England. Princeton was established by the "New Light" Presbyterians and was originally intended to train Presbyterian ministers. Ten Congregationalist ministers pooled their personal book collections to form Yale University's first library. Most of the other Ivy League schools were likewise founded by Christian people with sacred aims.

How is it, then, that today, the majority of our institutions of higher learning are not only blatantly humanist and atheist in their orientation, but they are fiercely intolerant of the ideas that energized their founders?

Likewise, the government itself—particularly the judicial branch of government until just recently—became dominated by those who reject the truth of the Bible and much of the Judeo-Christian framework upon which our nation had been founded and had flourished. For several decades the twentieth century brought us a series of disastrous U.S. Supreme Court rulings that turned the Constitution’s “freedom of religion” provision on its head: **So now we live in a society in which atheists file lawsuits to have “In God We Trust” erased from our money, in which the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) challenges almost every expression of our Christian heritage, and in which “faith-based initiatives”—of a kind our Founding Fathers enacted themselves—are considered by some legal minds to be a violation of the law. Simply put, we are watching the banishment of our heritage.**

At the same time, the great mainline denominations that had played such a key role in the early greatness of our nation began to **Abandon their biblical roots and become more theologically and politically liberal, progressively embracing much of the humanist agenda and thought.** And as they did, they began a steady slide into irrelevance and extinction – their cathedrals now filled with lukewarm, apathetic, powerless believers who lack the potency to influence the culture.

Starting in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, traditional Christianity went into retreat mode. So much so, that many of the proponents of the more “enlightened” ideologies began to foresee a glorious day in which America would be freed from the last vestiges of this primitive and restrictive belief system.

- 1973 **Gloria Steinem** felt optimistic enough to write, **“By the year 2000 we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God.”**
- **George Carlin** - **“I would never want to be a member of a group whose symbol was a guy nailed to two pieces of wood.”**
- Political strategist commonly refers to the blue states as enlightened territory and the red states as “Jesus Land”

What I am trying to convey to you is that the forces of secularism and humanism had identified their true enemy. In their view, **Republicans or even political conservatives were not really the problem—Christians and Christianity are** - Hence this is the source of the battle in which we find ourselves locked today.

One noteworthy example is an essay by former Clinton administration Labor Secretary **Robert Reich in the magazine “The American Prospect”**. In the article, titled “Bush’s God,” Reich lumps America’s Christians together with rabid Islamic extremists and terrorists, but actually seems to

believe that little old Pentecostal grandmothers are the greater threat of the two. He wrote, The great conflict of the twenty-first century will not be between the West and terrorism.

“Terrorism is a tactic, not a belief. The true battle will be between modern civilization and anti-modernists; between those who believe in the primacy of the individual and those who believe that human beings owe their allegiance and identity to a higher authority; between those who give priority to life in this world and those who believe that human life is mere preparation for an existence beyond life; between those who believe in science, reason, and logic and those who believe that truth is revealed through Scripture and religious dogma. This terrorism will disrupt and destroy lives!”

- Secularist in the news media sneer at “fundamentalists” (the code word for evangelicals) as ignorant bigots. Those in Hollywood caricature them (by portraying born-again Christians as trailer-park trash with room-temperature IQs, or Savonarola wannabes). Liberals in politics smear Bible-believing Christians by comparing them to the religion of holy war and suicide bombers.
- Even the acclaimed Scientist **Richard Dawkins** hosted a television program in 2006 called “The Virus of Faith.” In it he compared **Moses to Hitler and labeled the New Testament “a sado-masochistic doctrine.”**
- 2004 book by genetic researcher Dean Hamer caused a major buzz in the general press and received wide national attention. In **The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes**, Hamer speculates that a series of genetic mutations cause us to be religiously oriented and to seek God. Hamer drew heavily from an earlier collection of essays and papers published as *Neurotheology: Brain, Science, Spirituality, Religious Experience* as well as *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience; Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*; and *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*.
 - Atheist activists immediately seized on the hypothesis and trumpeted it as additional proof that everything in the universe has a natural, material explanation. “See there,” they said, “your spiritual experiences and encounters with God are nothing more than a series of chemical reactions.”

Child of God, what I am attempting to communicate to you is where we currently are - our nation’s God-given destiny hangs on the outcome of the current cultural battle we are fighting. Today powerful forces would push the United States into the same godless pit Europe slid into decades ago. American Christians who travel to Europe are frequently stunned at how spiritually dark it is there, and at how little influence biblical ideas (or Bible-centered people) wield. They marvel that the very wellspring that produced Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Tyndale, Wycliffe, and the Wesley brothers could have now grown so desperately dry.

America's best hope for avoiding a similar future lies within those who are faithful to the biblical standards handed down to them from past generations. **A vital, informed church, passionately living out the truth of the gospel, is what the great physician has ordered for America.** In fact, the church of Jesus Christ is the doctor. But at this crucial moment in history, the physician is ailing.

If we are ever going to turn the light back on in our culture, we must rise up in spiritual aggression and address some issues in God's house. **Judgment must begin in His house.** We have no right to address the condition or the consequences of our fallen world until we first return to discarded truths of faith. Revival and spiritual reformation starts with you and I. Its time to once again...

TURN THE LIGHT ON!

What issues must be addressed... 3 specific areas:

1. **Assimilation Syndrome**—A people of maximum influence and cultural impact would follow Scripture's command to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). They would take to heart Jesus' declaration that we are the light and salt of the world, as well as His warning that salt which has lost its distinctive savor is worthless because it has lost its ability to act as a preservative (Matthew 5:13). And they would boldly live out the master's desire that they be in the world, and yet not of it (John 17).
 - So how does our current generation of American believers measure up to that standard? It's not pretty. A wealth of research conducted over the last five or ten years—much of it by Christian pollster George Barna of Barna Research—tells an alarming story.
 - In category after category, born-again, Jesus-professing people show precious little difference in behaviors or demonstrated values than the unchurched and unsaved.
 - Today born-again married couples are no more likely to stay together than non-Christian couples. **The divorce rates are identical.**
 - Born-again individuals were only slightly less likely to be on anti-depressant drugs (7 percent versus 8 percent).
 - **1 in 5 women having abortions were born-again, evangelical churchgoers.**
 - In an average month, **fewer than 10% of church families pray together.**
 - Churched Christians gave away on average, **only 3% of their income in a typical year and were less likely than unbelievers to donate to a charity.**
 - Only 8 % of senior pastors claim to have the gift of evangelism and **only 1 in 20 Christians make sharing their faith a part of their lifestyle.**

WE DESERATELY NEED TO TURN THE LIGHT BACK ON!

2. **Comfort Syndrome**—Biblically and historically, the decision to follow Christ was a decision that required “cost counting.” It was a decision for sacrifice and service. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24–25 KJV). In other words, as I stated earlier, self-denial is “entry-level” Christianity.
- **Yet we live in a generation of believers that has seemingly made the cross a gateway for self-help and converted the call to a life of Christian service into a quest for comfort and pleasure.** We want safety without sacrifice, victory without conflict, and wind and rain without thunder and lightning. We have become self-indulgent, self-seeking, and self-satisfied.”
 - This is due, in no small measure, to a general decline of biblical preaching. Pop psychology, rooted in humanist assumptions, has supplanted biblical principles in many pulpits. In some quarters, strong preaching—preaching that challenged saints to a life of sacrifice and equipped them for the rigors of service—deteriorated into little more than self-help homilies and success motivation rallies.
 - **Our preachers are no longer prophets from out of the wilderness, clothed with camel hair and eating wild honey; they are slick-haired, shiny-shoed pulpiteers, selected by backslidden church boards not because of the life of God within them, but because of their carefully cultivated Las Vegas-style ability to dazzle this personality cult we used to call the church.**
 - **The pastoral imperative stopped being “Feed My sheep” and became “Entertain My sheep!”** We have traded gospel preaching motivated by a heavenly desire for redemptive change for worldly diversions motivated by a sensual desire for temporal pleasure. As a result, we created vast segments of Christianity that are self-oriented, inward looking and comfort seeking – totally ill-equipped for the cultural challenge of the day.
 - **The order of the day is comfort, not conviction; rebellion, not repentance; family nights, not family altars. Religious institutions have become social clubs, better known for their adultery, alcoholism, and laziness than for their love for lost souls staggering toward the edge of eternity with no remedy in sight. Our architecture is attractive, but our attitudes are repulsive. Our buildings are strong, but our character is weak.**

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3. **Isolation Syndrome**—Today, it is customary to judge the effectiveness or success of a ministry by how many people come to its worship services. In ages past, the standard of

success was not how many people were coming, but how many people were going—going into the culture of which they were a part to live a transformed life, especially in the presence of ridicule and persecution.

- The failure of the church to actively, vigorously, and positively engage the culture has led to defeatism and isolation. The current generation of believers has failed to meet the culture squarely in the marketplace of ideas and present a relevant, compelling gospel. The implications of that failure are troubling. We have forfeited leadership in each of the seven spheres of society: home; the church; education; media; the arts (including entertainment and sports); commerce, science, and technology; and government and politics.
- While Christians are at the forefront of the cultural debate, they are not generally at the forefront of the battles to recapture a Christian culture. They do not think of a distinctly Christian mission in art, music, education, business, technology, politics, the economy and other areas of culture. Christians, in fact, are not winning today's culture wars, because they have never fought them. They are not fighting them because they no longer have any aptitude for cultural leadership. They have no aptitude for cultural leadership because they have no interest in it. They have no interest in cultural leadership because they do not see culture as a religious calling.

This is not the time to hide in our church caves waiting on the end of the world with cowardice as our cloak. In a day of gross darkness this is our time to **TURN THE LIGHT BACK ON!**

Conclusion:

Jesus said, **“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12)**. Only twenty-eight months later, Jesus died a bloody and tortured death, rose from the dead, and ascended on high. Then His disciples were endued with power by the Holy Spirit.

- Peter the former denier became Peter the bold apostle, who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to thousands of devout Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand Jews received Christ as Lord and Savior that day, and the church was born with the very first explosion of Holy Spirit power through the medium of man (Acts 2).
- The next thing we hear in the third chapter of the book of Acts, Peter and John paused long enough to give what they had to a disabled outcast positioned outside the Gate Beautiful. His excited response to his miraculous healing gathered another crowd to hear the second evangelistic sermon of the church. Five thousand souls pressed their way into the kingdom of light, and the apostles had the world's first megachurch after ministering only a week.”

The steady stream of miracles, deliverance, and supernatural overthrow of the kingdom of darkness accelerated so quickly that the combined power of Rome and hell itself couldn't quench the revival fires. God poured His Holy Spirit power into fishermen, malcontents, doctors, lawyers, table waiters, and homemakers, and they turned their world upside down, epitomizing the true meaning of "no fear." It is amazing to see how fast things happen when people put Jesus at the center of their lives and **TURN THE LIGHT ON!**

The nation is sick; however, it stopped going to the doctor down the street long ago because **Doctor Church dispensed powerless placebos and foolish fantasies instead of heavenly heart transplants. Religious nostrums and endless prescription programs didn't get the job done, and the popular practice of delivering carefully manicured and politically correct preaching only made things worse.** Such spiritual malpractice has managed to inoculate the nation against the infectious power of genuine truth. This hell-bound generation doesn't need church as usual; it needs a preacher and a church family with a message steeped in heavenly violence and divine love. **It needs for someone like "The Bend" to TURN THE LIGHT ON!**

I believe that a Holy Spirit invasion is taking place, and we need to lift up our voices like trumpets and sound the alarm. We need to realign the orbit of our lives to conform to the center of all things—the Son of the living God. Our Son is a burning fire and an eternal source of power and light. I am talking about putting God back on the throne at the center of our lives and ministries and turning the light back on!

When we return the Son to the center of our universe, we will hear thousands of reports about miraculous healings occurring through Sister Susie's apron and Brother Mike's handkerchief. Holy Spirit-filled auto mechanics will lay hands on coworkers with limbs severed in the workplace and violently command them to be healed. And signs and wonders will become everyday occurrences.

Average shopping days will become community healing days when the shadows of the saints become vehicles of the healing power of the Holy Spirit in shopping malls, grocery stores, car lots, and Saturday morning yard sales. It is time for every table waiter in the kingdom to step out into the streets of cities and towns with the "Stephen anointing" to pray the prayer of faith for the sick and dying. As the Lord declared through the prophet thousands of years ago, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Isa. 43:19). God is waiting on you to turn the light on!

The first thing God created in the midst of Darkness is light. That light shines brightly in the darkness. It separated the darkness from the light and the Apostle John said that the darkness could not overcome it. From that day forward that glorious light of God's presence, Despite what hell has tried to do, shine for all of humanity to see and will continue to shine until sometime in the future at the consummation of all things when a glorious new Jerusalem will descend from

heaven like a bride adorned for her groom. The word of God declares That that city will have no need for the sun or the moon - for Jesus will be the light in the midst of her.

When you study specifically the new Jerusalem, you find out that that city he's not talking about a denomination. It is speaking about the body of Christ globally. It will be the city that is set on a hill that can never be hidden! You and I are that city!

This is why the Bible describes God this way: God is light!

Those who dwell in him cannot abide in darkness. Jesus then came along and declared that he was the light of the world. However, before he left this planet his final declaration was that you and I are the light of the world.

It is time to turn the light back on!