

THE
ECLIPSE
OF
GOD

ERWIN W. LUTZER



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PART 1



SEARCHING
FOR LIGHT IN
A WORLD OF
DARKNESS

Life in the Shadows: The Eclipse of God

Searching for Light in Our Darkness

C.S. Lewis wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”¹

But what happens when there is an eclipse of the sun? The moon comes between the earth and the sun, blocking the sunlight from reaching the Earth. As for the sun, it shines as brightly as ever, but its light is obscured. This doesn't mean the Earth is totally dark; there are still glimmers of light, enough to move from place to place, but probably not enough to read a book. And if it is a total eclipse, you might lose your sense of direction and be unsure of where your destination lies. Darkness can be terrifying.

Today the moon of radical secularism has obscured the light of God; God is still God, but our nation no longer sees or acknowledges Him. In the darkness, you cannot tell the difference between an ordinary brick and a piece of gold; you cannot tell whether you are holding a diamond or a chip of iron ore. In the darkness, stumbling is inevitable. Look around you, and you will find a nation

groping, looking for answers in places where there are none to be found. “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19).

Yes, America is experiencing a near-total eclipse. Secularism continues to make gains and is coming to its conclusion in morals, law, and education. We see the increase in violence, treachery, the abuse of the law, depravity, racial conflict, sexual perversity, drug use, and suicide. Darkness is being protected and normalized while light is being vilified and criminalized. Light is seen as a threat that must be extinguished.

The speed and extent of the changes taking place in our society should shake us into reality. We have enormous challenges ahead of us.

WHEN GOD’S FACE IS HIDDEN

Ancient Israel experienced the consequences of an eclipse of God. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah describes such an eclipse and judgment that followed: “Behold the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; *but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear*” (Isaiah 59:1-2, emphasis added).

For “God’s face to be hidden” is a figure of speech meaning that His blessing and protection have been lifted. Satanically inspired evil fills the vacuum, and shadows spread over the land. In the confusion, darkness is called light, and light is called darkness. In our day, this darkness is personal. Many people are living in despair, even contemplating suicide for the simple reason that they are trying their best to manage sin without believing in a God who is actually able to forgive them. They are left on their own to deal with their

emotional brokenness without the cleansing and healing of God. Try as they might, they cannot wish their guilt and self-hatred away.

When God hides His face, we are left like a rowboat without oars, like a wanderer without a map and without a purpose. And the consequences are devastating. With the God of the Bible abandoned, we have no choice but to look to ourselves for guidance and meaning. As a result, we live randomly without an ultimate purpose, waking each morning hoping to eke out whatever pleasures we can find as our lives pass in a meaningless search for significance. And because everyone worships something, we are tempted to choose gods we can control; gods that will not judge us but affirm us; gods who do not demand repentance. Such gods do not create us; *we create them*. And these gods can only lead us into greater darkness.

Millions among us are living with what someone has called *self-directed aimlessness*, searching for some self-made god to give them meaning.

The Conflict Between Light and Darkness

What is darkness?

Spiritual darkness is the exaltation of human beings to believe they can run their own lives apart from God; it is self-dominance, an emphasis on personal independence along with rampant sexuality. Darkness is the view that if there is any meaning in life, it must be self-created; it claims that “you can be whatever you want to be,” and everyone should bow to who you are. It is the lie of Satan to Adam and Eve: You are worthy to be your own god, so reject God’s restrictions. Your problem is not sin; it is ignorance of who you already are. Darkness is celebrating evil.

Sin, we are told, leads to liberation.

What is light? Light is the spiritual and moral illumination that comes from God; it is the biblical assessment of the bad news of

human sin and the good news of the redemption God offers through Christ. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). To walk in the light is to have personal fellowship with God.

The Darkness Deepens

The dark paganization of America is most clearly seen with the sexualization of our children. Depraved minds who support this satanic assault want our children to be confused, sexually exploited, and their souls destroyed. “We’re here, we’re queer, we’re coming for your children!”² the activists shout. And although some might say this chant should not be taken seriously, the fact is, yes, they are coming for our children. And when sexualized leftists come for our children, we know we are in the final stages of utter moral decay.

Consider the proliferation of drag queen shows used to groom children. At first when we warned about what was coming, we were told we were spreading a conspiracy theory, but as often happens, the conspiracy theory turned out to be a reality. Matt Walsh explains:

A few years ago, back when conservatives first started to warn about the leftist plot to sexualize children by exposing them to drag queens, the most common response from the Left was to deny that any such thing is happening, “Drag for children?” they said indignantly. “Don’t be ridiculous. This is a right-wing conspiracy theory!” But these things always follow the same script. First they deny the thing, then they admit that thing is happening but only rarely and it’s not anything we need to worry about, and then, very quickly, they announce that actually the thing is happening, it’s happening a lot, it’s good that it’s happening a lot, and it should happen a lot more...but it needs to happen because people’s lives depend on it.³

Those who protest against this debauchery are told that they are “censors” and “book burners” and suffer from “drag phobia.” All this from the very people who have done a great deal to censor or de-platform those who give a conservative voice to issues of morality and politics. Thank God there are still many parents in America who are pushing back against this onslaught.

Be warned: In ancient Israel, when parents offered their children to pagan deities, this was the final evil that led to the destruction of Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 32:35-36). Let us read what God said about Israel’s sacrifice of children: “You took your sons and your daughters, *whom you had borne to me*, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered *my children* and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?” (Ezekiel 16:20-21, emphasis added).

Don’t hurry over this. God said that even these children belonged to Him; the sons and daughters offered to ancient deities were “borne” to Him. These were *His* children. And remember, these were sacrifices to the dark world of demonic spirits. Here is the divinely inspired commentary on what was happening: “They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood” (Psalm 106:36-38). In our day, Baal, the ancient god of sex and child sacrifice, has returned.

Today, parents who offer their children to the goddess of sexuality are not only destroying them but are doing great wickedness before God. To cauterize a child’s conscience by telling him or her that perversion is normal is an attack against a child’s soul. To ask a child to question his or her gender and to deliberately enflame lust causes confusion and guilt, and thus destroys the child’s sense of

decency and identity. And imagine the evil of those “gender affirming” individuals who recommend irreversible surgery for children and young adults with the result that they will never have the privilege of being a biological parent. Just as in ancient Israel, children today are being offered to demons of perversion and the widespread rebellion of our culture. Children are not safe in a pagan world.

Pedophilia is the next barrier that will fall.

A TEDx talk by Mirjam Heine argued that pedophilia is a sexual orientation that is inherent and unchangeable. She emphasized that pedophiles should not be judged but accepted; this, we are told, will help them to not act on their desires, for she agreed they must be restrained.⁴ But if the argument is made that the sexual orientation of pedophiles is unchangeable, are we not depriving them of the sexual pleasure they deserve?

Until now, even the progressive Left has agreed that children are too young to consent to sex. But what if “research” shows that having sex with children is important for their development? Then anyone who argues against it would not only be impeding moral progress, but withholding sex might be perpetuating “harm” to children.

Far-fetched?

In the next chapter, we will be introduced to an influential researcher who, decades ago, argued for pedophilia. We must understand how a moral revolution takes place and cultural dominoes fall. Remember, it was only several years ago when saying that a boy can become a girl and a girl can become a boy was deemed absurd. But, to use the terminology of Francis Schaeffer, in one era, the *unthinkable* becomes *thinkable*; and within time, a new *unthinkable* will become *thinkable*. Remember, when God is evicted out of the consciousness of a person or nation, demonic darkness rushes in—and this darkness has no boundaries, no limits, and no restraints.

Whatever evil can be thought can be done. Thank God that He often restrains evil!

Jesus had something to say about anyone who would cause a little one to stumble: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Meanwhile, in our so-called cancel culture, we have seen how the radical Left does not tolerate disagreement. In their minds, they are so enlightened that alternate points of view are often vilified or silenced. Ideology, even if unsupported by facts and reason, must prevail. To state that the values of the West (e.g., democracy, freedom, the nuclear family, and capitalism) are better than those of many other countries is no longer met by counterevidence, but rather, vilification. Cultural Marxism insists there must be equality of outcomes among individuals and nations; this can be accomplished only by destroying personal freedom. So the Judeo-Christian values of the West that stress individualism and personal responsibility are rejected as racist and nationalistic. Thus, the goal of much in our educational system is the demoralization of the West, particularly the United States.

As Adolf Hitler predicted, with the right use of propaganda, heaven can be made to appear like hell and hell like heaven. Like an avalanche racing down a mountain and obliterating everything in its wake, so our cultural *zeitgeist* is attempting to destroy everything that is rational, reasonable, and morally upright. The Judeo-Christian influences of our country are being discarded without any sober thought as to what might be a better foundation on which to build a civilized society. When I see the deep divisions in this country, I am reminded of a sign I saw in a Muslim demonstration: “We will use the freedoms of the Constitution to destroy the

Constitution!” We are so fragmented religiously, morally, and politically that we do not know who we are.

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We should give thanks to God for the privilege of giving hope to a confused nation that is being torn apart by various factions and loud incriminations.

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This is a battle that reason, science, and common sense cannot win. Irrationality has gripped our nation. And as Paul predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, prior to the coming of the Antichrist, people would experience a “strong delusion” so they would believe “what is false.” In other words, The Lie. I believe that The Lie is man substituting himself for God.

Meanwhile, we should give thanks to God for the privilege of giving hope to a confused nation that is being torn apart by various factions and loud incriminations. Like many countries in the world, we are in a period of internal unrest and many are looking for solid footing when the foundations around us are crumbling.

Let us focus more directly on what is happening here in the United States.

AMERICA’S UNIQUE CONSTITUTION

The United States was never an explicitly Christian nation, but our republic is an outgrowth of the Judeo-Christian influence upon which it was founded. Historically, this nation benefited from a Christian ethos; among the shared values were honoring the nuclear family, respecting the law, displaying common compassion and decency, and most importantly, permitting religious freedom. But

as these core values are being challenged, we are edging deeper into political and moral darkness.

Unfortunately, many Americans simply do not appreciate the uniqueness of our constitutional form of government. It was built upon what Os Guinness described as the “golden triangle” that gave birth to our freedoms. In short, “Freedom requires virtue, which requires faith, which requires freedom.”⁵

But let’s think about it: If freedom requires virtue, what happens when virtue is replaced by unrestrained self-interest and entitlement? What happens when faith—namely, a belief in God and His laws—collapses and impersonal manmade gods take His place? What follows is that virtue is soon replaced by entitlement and a quest for power, almost always resulting in the loss of individual freedom. (Of course, we know that historically, true believers have often exercised courageous faith even under the heavy hand of tyranny.)

America is far from perfect, and never will be. We must recognize our failure to live up to our ideals both historically and in the present. But our Judeo-Christian heritage has given us the ability to preserve freedoms and has led to prosperity, by which Americans have been able to fund missionary work around the world. We should not think we as a nation have earned God’s favor, but we must humbly entreat Him to give us wisdom to use our hard-won freedoms for spreading the gospel.

The Founding Fathers structured a government with three branches to provide stability and the possibility of self-correction as abuses arose. Without balancing freedom and political power, a nation must either drift into unrestrained chaos or accept tyranny. America has been able to maintain that balance because of its belief in God as the foundation of ordered liberty. Yes, thankfully, the nation does not compel belief, hence atheists are also welcome. But balancing liberty and law is a delicate task.

So can the Constitution protect us from all enemies, foreign and domestic? Can it preserve our freedoms? Of course not. Our politicians and judges can swear allegiance to the Constitution and then ignore it. China's constitution is a reasonably sane document preserving the freedom of the people, but words on paper mean nothing in the hands of tyrants. When power replaces truth and self-interest replaces character, words on a page are meaningless.

As believers, we dare not back away from the challenges that are on our doorstep. The better we understand our present crisis, the better we will understand why the voice of the church is more necessary than ever in our nation. If we have the faith to believe it, these are days of new opportunities for the church to be the church. We must live and work to create the unity that only the gospel can bring. The task can appear daunting, but we must gladly accept our calling. We are called to give hope to a nation that is in disarray.

Thankfully, God is present to give guidance and blessing to His people. We should view this moment of history as an unprecedented opportunity to represent Christ in the midst of our needy nation. We were born for this hour and none other.

Let us remember that darkness never retreats on its own; only light can expose it.

WHY THIS BOOK?

No matter today's news, as believers we must not lose sight of our God, who is majestic, sovereign, and faithful to His Word. We are called to prove that while the cult of diversity might destroy our nation, it need not destroy the church. We, as God's ambassadors, welcome people from all backgrounds, races, and religions to hear our message of the gospel of peace—a gospel that reconciles

us to God and to one another. The gospel brings unity in the face of diversity; it brings forgiveness in the face of revenge and peace in the midst of chaos.

The church can be growing stronger even as our culture is declining.

We dare not forget who we are: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Even as darkness deepens with wars, anarchy, rampant immorality, or an economic meltdown, we must still declare the excellencies of God and His marvelous light. Or, to put it more emphatically, in war, anarchy, rampant immorality, or an economic meltdown, *it is even more urgent that we declare the excellencies of God and His marvelous light!*



The sun still shines behind the eclipse, and not even a determined secular world can blot out the witness of God’s servants who are dedicated to sharing the light.



As the fifth-century philosopher Augustine would put it, the city of man can be in decline even as the city of God gains in strength. When Rome was destroyed, he reportedly said, “Whatever men build, men will destroy, so let’s get on with the business of building the kingdom of God.”

Let every fragment of bad news (of which there is plenty) be a motivation to unite with other believers to pray, witness, and be Christ’s hands and feet in a broken world. Behind the bad news, there is also good news: The sun still shines behind the eclipse, and not even a determined secular world can blot out the witness of

God's servants who are dedicated to sharing the light. And behind the headlines, God is at work.

So I write with three objectives.

1. To better understand the intellectual roots of this present darkness.

Like a doctor who diagnoses a disease before he prescribes a cure, so must we understand the ideas that got us here and how we can combat them. Doctors don't begin with heart surgery until they have done a diagnosis and are certain the patient is not having a gall bladder attack or some other ailment. In order to understand the eclipse of God, we must understand the philosophers who insisted that society should jettison its belief in accountability to God and put us in place as the supreme ruler of ourselves.

Like it or not, philosophers have shaped our modern world. Behind our moral and spiritual battles are thinkers who have convincingly articulated the original lie of Eden—that man should replace God. As such, many of them have had a massive impact in reviling the Christian faith.

We will answer questions such as these: Who are those blind guides who have led millions to fall into a spiritual pit? Who are those who have shaped our culture, given us destructive values, and traded our freedoms for tyranny? Who are those who have told us that God was oppressive and that human autonomy was the epitome of progress? Who are those whose theology promised a false hope that led us to moral and spiritual bankruptcy?

So, be warned: The next chapter will introduce us to three European philosophers whose dark shadows have spread throughout the West, including, of course, the United States. We will see that we can draw a direct line to many destructive ideas in our culture by considering those towering historical figures who sent us down a wrong

path. As we have all heard it said, ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have victims.

There is a second reason for this book.

2. To rejoice that God is sovereign and stands ready to give us the blessing of His presence, no matter our predicament.

If we seriously focus on God in our worship and service, we can view our culture's darkness as an opportunity, not a liability. As mentioned, our fortunes as believers are not tied to the fortunes of the culture. God stands above our cultural and political feuds ready to give us "power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Is God a Republican or Democrat? How does He vote?

This is not unlike the question that Joshua posed when he made a reconnaissance trip around Jericho the night before he planned to capture the city. A man appeared to him with a sword drawn in his hand. Joshua, in attempting to identify him, asked, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" The reply: "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come" (Joshua 5:13-14).

I have not come to take sides; I have come to take over.

In the midst of our political wrangling, we must realize that God is not a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent. He is not running for office; He actually is God, and He is not just applying for the job!

Many of us spend time complaining about the political leaders of our nation, and there is much to complain about. But we need to step back and remember they rule at God's pleasure. Nebuchadnezzar was an evil king whose armies brutally conquered the Jewish people, and yet three times, God said of this evil ruler that he—Nebuchadnezzar—is "my servant" (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). *God does not wait for the news; through His divine hand of providence, He creates the news!*

How big is the moon in relation to the sun?

If the moon of secularism has obscured the light of God, we must ask: How big is the moon in relationship to the sun? To the human eye, the sun and the moon seem to be about equal in size, but of course their actual sizes are hugely disproportionate. They look the same size only because the moon is 400 times closer to Earth than the sun, and the sun is 400 times bigger than the moon. So the moon might seem to be equal in size and prominence as the sun, but in fact, it is minuscule in comparison to it.

Secularism might appear to be as big as God, but God thinks otherwise: “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust” (Isaiah 40:15). Take the 193 nations of the world, and they are like fine dust in the presence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God.

And there is more.

The moon has no light of its own; it shines at night because it reflects the sun’s light. Without the sun, the moon would go entirely dark, powerless to shed light on Earth. Just so, secularism is totally dependent on God for any power it might exercise; even the wicked could not exist without God’s permission and power. When the Antichrist arises and most of the world worships him, he will still be totally dependent on God for every breath he takes. In the words attributed to Martin Luther, “Even the devil is God’s devil!”

Are you distressed because of our political polarization and wrangling? When Uzziah—the king who brought stability to ancient Israel for 52 years—died, the prophet Isaiah no doubt was concerned about the nation’s future. So God graciously gave him a vision: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). Why this vision? God wanted the prophet

to remember that *even when a throne on Earth is empty, the throne of heaven is occupied.*

Psalms 103:19 reads, “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” Who established God’s throne? Who crowned Him Lord of the universe? The answer, of course, is no one except Himself: God has been on His throne forever; He has established Himself, and yes, His kingdom rules over all. Such promises are given to us not to make us complacent, but rather, to embolden us to stand confidently for Him in the face of adversity. We know matters are not determined by Earth but heaven. That’s why a friend of John Calvin, Theodore Beza, could say to the king of Navarre, who was persecuting Christians, “May it please your Majesty to remember, that she [the church] is an anvil that hath already broken many hammers.”⁶

And knowing that God is in charge, we can fight the good fight from the standpoint of victory, not the standpoint of defeat. Remember, because every detail of the past and the future is known to Him, *He has already lived our tomorrows.*⁷

God oversees the vote in every election; no one rules but by His decree. Those who worship Him with the most fervor are the ones He enables to confidently represent Him in our fallen world. Even we as fearful believers have the resources to be faithful in adversity if only we would remember who God is. We are not culture bound.

There is one more objective for this book.

3. To remind us that only a repentant and submissive church can shine the light of the gospel with confidence and strength.

We are up against those who are convinced we can easily be crushed under the weight of secularization. Dennis Peacocke warns, “One thing is certain, that virtually no one in ‘the real world’ expects Christians to be a significant contributing factor in the process of

creating a counteraction to secularism.”⁸ According to him, secularists just turn a deaf ear to our complaints and expect us to go away. But only with God’s power can we have the courage to prove them wrong; and that power comes only to the desperate, the spiritually attuned, and the repentant. The battle is fierce. But like it or not, we are writing the next page of church history.

Seeing our battle as primarily a spiritual conflict will drive us to prayer; we will realize that we cannot fight the world on its terms. Only then will we see that when we engage with those who differ, our ultimate goal is to point people to the light of the world. Of Jesus we read, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5). And as Christ’s representatives, we have been called to share His light with the world. And “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).

What would most glorify Christ? The answer is a people who are distinct from the world because Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). In other words: a church that is *in* the culture, but not *of* the culture; a church that is a beacon of hope in a disintegrating culture.

The church has always been called to light a path in the night. Paul challenged believers who lived in a pagan culture with these words:

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain (Philippians 2:14-16).

The deeper the darkness, the more necessary light becomes. Or, as Apollon Maykov put it, “The darker the night, the brighter the stars, the deeper the grief, the closer is God.”⁹



Will we face the future with pessimism because we see the cultural disintegration around us, or will we be optimistic because we believe in God and that history will unfold according to His plan?



Unless we as God’s people return in humble repentance to the God of the Bible—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—we and our children and grandchildren will be swept away by the rising tides of irrationality and sexual perversion. We cannot stand against Babylon with a Christianity that expects nothing, demands nothing, and stands for nothing. Or, to put it differently, we cannot conquer Jericho with a wilderness heart.

As a church, we are at the crossroads: Will we face the future with pessimism because we see the cultural disintegration around us, or will we be optimistic because we believe in God and that history will unfold according to His plan? Are we willing to suffer for our convictions? And do so with compassion? Remember that millions among us have no hope beyond the haphazard struggles of this world.

We must not resort to anger and retaliation. We must cling to the gospel, sharing the redemption of Christ with as many as will hear; we must point men and women to the Light of the World and be willing to suffer the consequences of our identification with the One who died that we might have life. This is a tall order, but this is the task to which we have been called.

Let me repeat: This is not just a battle of ideas, but a cosmic battle for the minds of men, women, and children. It is a spiritual conflict. Ponder the words of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army: “I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell.”¹⁰

Let’s get over the idea that we can please everyone. Truth, no matter how lovingly presented, will illicit indifference and even hatred among those committed to secularism. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). We are called to love our enemies (and that includes our ideological enemies), but they have no such calling on their lives. In fact, as we will see, their tactics might lead to destruction; ours should be loving but courageous engagement. Let us respect everyone, even when we can’t respect what they say or believe.

Be warned: Our culture seeks to use intimidation to achieve domination. Let’s not think our road will be easy; Jesus was the “light of the world” and yet He was crucified. Millions of our brothers and sisters live in countries where faithfulness demands giving up their income and even their lives. They were motivated by another world.

Running throughout this book, whether stated explicitly or implicitly, are these questions: *What price are we willing to pay to do the right thing? And to declare the right message? And to live for God’s glory and not our own?*

Each chapter of this book will end with a suggested “Declaration of Dependence” and an Action Step encouraging us to begin a journey that will end on our knees. Let us remember that the sun is still shining behind the eclipse. “Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!” (Psalm 80:19).

In the next chapter, we will discover why the cathedrals of Europe are empty, and why we are witnessing the same decline of Christian influence here in the United States. Be prepared to jump into some philosophical waters.

A DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

Are we personally experiencing an “eclipse of God”? That is, have we lost a sense of His presence and favor? Are there clouds in our lives that must be confessed and forsaken so God’s favor can return? We need God’s light to shine in our lives before we can impact the darkness around us. How can we shine His light if we ourselves are walking in moral and spiritual darkness?

Here is a rebuke we must heed: “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another [that is, we have fellowship with God and He has fellowship with us], and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7). Many Christians—when they become dead honest—will admit they are not walking in complete transparency and honesty with God. There are shadows in their lives that keep a formal distance between them and Him. They have the right words, but their heart is elsewhere. To all of us I say, “There is no substitute for repentance.”

What is the most distinguishing mark of the people of God? It is what the Puritans called “the manifest presence of God.” Moses asked the question, “How shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” (Exodus 33:16). And Paul said that when

people come into our congregations, they should be able to say, “God is really among you” (1 Corinthians 14:25).

Even when a nation experiences an eclipse of God, we can personally experience the light of His presence. Let us spend time seeking His favor. John Piper writes,

This setting of the mind is the opposite of mental coasting. It is a conscious choice to direct the heart toward God. This is what Paul prays for the church: “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5). It is a conscious effort on our part. But that effort to seek God is a gift from God.¹¹

With Moses, let us pray, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). Only the light of God can dissipate the darkness.

Let us “seek the LORD while he may be found, and call upon him when he is near” (Isaiah 55:6).

ACTION STEP

In response to this opening chapter, let us resolve to pay as much attention to our soul as we do our body. Let us give attention to our own sins rather than the sins of the culture. We face a common enemy—namely, Satan—and we have to fight together with the “shield of faith” against the “cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). So, before we engage the war without, let us recognize the

war within us—a war against various sins and unacknowledged self-righteousness. Let us resolve to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Let us be united in the battle against the encroaching darkness. *United we stand; divided we fall.*

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any frivolous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!

(Psalm 139:23-24).