

CHAPTER 6

THIS PRESENT DARKNESS

Another area of deception must be considered and understood if we are to win the spiritual battle for souls effectively. That is the secular—or worldly—deception that Satan and his demons cast upon the world that does not know God. The Bible calls this deception *darkness*.

We can easily define spiritual darkness as a lack of revelation and understanding of God and His Kingdom. Spiritual darkness seeks to hide the righteousness of God—as well as His eternal plans and purposes. It prevails in the world systems. This darkness prevents men and women from seeking God and His plan for their lives. Without a working knowledge of God, they are left to try to control the systems of the world through the flesh, sinful motives and actions, and even demonic power.

Religion (without the Spirit of God) has played a huge role in this effort to control things. Over the centuries, some, claiming to represent God, have done atrocious things in the name of religion. Wars, Inquisitions, murder, financial scams, and more have all been done in the name of God. We must insist that the people who do these things in God's name do not know Him—or He, them.

Jesus said that many would come in His name and claim to do great religious works. Despite all their claims of doing things in His name, He will say to them, depart from me you who work iniquity, I never knew you. Wow. Let us back up a second. First, Jesus used the word many—meaning, not a few. Then He made two other significant statements. He called them “workers of iniquity.” Iniquity means *lawlessness*. An easier way to look at this is the say they were self-willed. They claimed to be doing God’s will, but Jesus made it clear they were doing their own will in His name. The last thing to note is Jesus saying, “I never knew you.” They thought they knew God, but God did not know them.

Paul must have had the words of Jesus in mind when He penned these words to Timothy.

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” 2 Timothy 2:18-19

God does not use the flesh or any ungodly methods to promote His righteous Kingdom. These things come from demonic darkness.

The first thing God spoke into existence was light. However, He did not create the sun until the fourth day. What was the light God created in the beginning? Was it physical light, or perhaps spiritual light? Was it a demonstration of His power, or was it a revelation of Himself? Was it the illumination of the universe or the universal declaration of the defeat of darkness? In the Book of the Revelation, John tells us there is no need for sun and moon (physical light) in the new heaven and earth because the glory of God and the Lamb is the light source. Carefully consider the implication of these two verses in the context of our discussion.

For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Cor. 4:6

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light.... The Book of the Revelation 21:3-4a

To this train of thought, we could add what John tells us about Jesus in the first chapter of his Gospel. Jesus was the word of God, and through Him, God created everything. John also said Jesus was the light of the world. Jesus said, if anyone follows Me, he will not walk in darkness (John 8:12). There is a spiritual light that does not need a physical source, such as the sun.

The darkness we are referring to includes the religious deception we have been discussing but is far greater. It also encompasses the economic, philosophical, social, educational, and political ideologies that operate in the realm the Bible calls *the world*. We could describe it as a secular worldview as opposed to a Biblical worldview. Secular is defined, in part, this way: “denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis....” (The Oxford Dictionary).

These two world views are opposites. Secular worldview—at best—simply does not want to acknowledge God and—at worst—actively fights against God. It makes no difference if the darkness is passive (we do not recognize the existence or relevance of any god or gods) or antagonistic (we believe in God and hate everything He stands for). The result is the same: Those in darkness deny God His rightful place in the lives of His creation. The end goal is to defeat the eternal purpose of God in the lives of those He loves.

On the other hand, the biblical worldview encompasses what God has revealed about Himself and his purposes through the Bible. It acknowledges God’s role and rights as the creator and His claims to rule uncontested and judge with a righteous and final judgment. A Biblical worldview would also include humanity’s important role in cooperating with God in fulfilling His eternal purposes on earth and in the universe.

The principalities and powers in the demonic realm are actively opposed to God and His purposes. However, that does not mean that every person with a secular worldview is demonically motivated. Many are simply deceived by the worldly darkness that exists. This is one of the strategic goals of the demonic principalities and powers that wage war in the unseen realms.

The reality of this spiritual darkness explains the all-out attack on the authenticity and authority of the Bible. In another chapter, we looked at this attack in greater depth. Suffice it to say; if God has not spoken, there is no basis for faith (Romans 10:17). Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Suppose Satan can undermine the authenticity and authority of the Bible in the minds of people. In that case, he effectively wins the battle unless light (revelation) from the Holy Spirit overcomes the spiritual darkness. That revelation comes because of Spirit-empowered prayer and evangelism on the part of the Church.

I want to drop in an important side note here. God is not opposed to the earth. The earth and its fulness belong to God. The term *the world* refers to the secular, man-made systems that control people. Biblically speaking, the earth and the world are not the same thing and should not be confused.

Some evangelicals have ceded the earth to Satan because of false theology. It sounds like this, “This world is not my home; I am just passing through.” That sounds spiritual, but is it? God created the earth for Adam and gave him authority over it to “dress it and keep it.” Adam was given dominion over the animals. It was through Adam’s sin that Satan obtained a temporary controlling interest in the secular world. God never rescinded humanity’s right to manage the earth and set up a Godly society, but instead, man forfeited it. When Jesus was on earth, He had complete authority over the natural world. He walked on water, multiplied food, calmed raging storms, healed disease, and raised the dead. Jesus passed this mandate to His followers who, according to Jesus, will do even more and greater things through the power of the Holy Spirit. Your assignment as a Spirit-filled Christian is to be like Jesus in every way.

The apostle John spoke much of this world. He was referring to the secular worldview propagated by both demonic and humanistic ideologies. He said, do not love the world nor the things that pertain to the world. He went on to say that if we loved the [things of the] world, the love of God is not in us (1 John 2:15). He stated that the whole world lies under the influence of Satan (1 John 5:19). He reminded us that greater is the Holy Spirit in us than the devil who usurps authority in the world (1 John 4:4). Jesus said that He had “overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul called Satan the “*god of this age*” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) and “the prince of the power of the air.” (Ephesians 2:2).

Could it be that many in the Church still love the world so much that it hinders their effectiveness in the Kingdom of God?

Paul sums it up this way:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Ephesians 2:1-3

Paul uses the phrase “the course of this world.” He also said there was a demonic power behind this course or path that the world takes. There is a demonic spirit at work in the “sons of disobedience.” This phrase indicates a specific group of unpersuadable people—they have made up their mind and refuse any other reasoning.

Furthermore, the demonic powers and the course of this world are directly associated with the sins of the flesh. In other words, demonic forces promote ideologies and systems that influence the ebb and flow of the world and are designed to appeal to and empower humanity’s sinful nature. The demonic spirits behind these world systems have two key strategies. The first is deceiving humanity and getting them to buy into (or maintain) a secular worldview. The second is empowering certain people (the sons of disobedience) to do their will and propagate the systems that keep the world in bondage. These, and other strategies, have the goal of undermining God’s eternal purposes by keeping people ignorant of or hostile to God.

Peter agrees with Paul about the *behind-the-scenes* nature of our real struggle.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:2-4

Reading backward here, Peter reveals that this world’s corruption is caused by the lust of men (enticed and empowered by the demonic realm). He also explains that the solution to this universal issue is God's promises to His people in the Bible. Everything we need to live a Godly life has already been provided for us by God. We should not just think in terms of material things—like food, shelter, clothing, and money—but rather in a holistic way. John prayed that his readers would prosper and be in health, even as their souls prospered (3 John 1:2). For John, soul prosperity paved the way for mental and physical prosperity.

Then Peter makes an incredible statement? “You are partakers of the divine nature.” The

word partakers in Greek comes from the same word as *communion*. We are partners in the divine nature. We appropriate and share the divine nature. When we appropriate the promises of God, we become like Him.

Peter explains that access to these spiritual resources was through “the exceedingly great and precious promises of God.” In other words, overcoming the prince of the power of the air, the course of this world, and the lust that drives it all, is found in appropriating God’s promises. We do this through faith and obedience. Prayer and faith are not just about getting our needs met. Our divine purpose is carefully wrapped in this process of having a need, hearing God’s promises, exerting our faith in His word, persevering in the face of opposition and delay, and finally, becoming more like Christ.

It is safe to say God works in us before He works for us or through us. The result of this process is three-fold. First, we get the thing we need or want. Second—and perhaps more importantly—we obtain glory and virtue as we are transformed into the image of Christ in the journey. The third result is that we escape the corruption of the world as the lust in our soul is broken by the Spirit of God.

We cannot simply say, ‘you need to quit sinning.’ Although we should be conquering sin in our lives, there is a process that breaks the pull and allure of the world in our lives. We can use willpower for a time, but if we do not break the power of lust, we will circle back to the same old things repeatedly. The proverb about a dog returning to his vomit is appropriate here.

And the first shall be last. Peter starts this passage by telling us that peace and grace are multiplied to us through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. This is the light that the devil and his kingdom fight against. He fights to keep the light from the lost so they will never be saved. He fights to keep the light from Christians to hinder grace and peace from flowing in the lives of billions of believers, conforming them to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Paul agrees with this principle when he tells us that we are transformed through the renewing of our mind (12:2). If we do not allow the Word of God to change the way we think, we will never change our behavior long-term. Contrary to popular belief, the word repentance does not mean to quit sinning. It means to change our way of thinking (and your life will change as a result). This is the principle Paul was advocating.

The world is opposed to God and God to the world. The Bible indicates that Satan and his demonic principalities and powers govern the world and its systems. They have influenced men throughout the ages and in various geographical regions of the world with ungodly powers, motives, and thinking.

The atheistic political systems of the world come in several forms. The humanists simply

think humanity is smart enough and reasonable enough to solve our problems without religion. They claim man is fundamentally good, and if we can get rid of those institutions that divide us—especially religion—we will suddenly hold hands and start loving each other. Human reason will prevail, and we will end war, ignorance, and poverty. Yeah, good luck with that. Simply look at countries that have humanistic governments today. It does not work.

In the twentieth century alone, various forms of communism sought to eliminate the knowledge of God and killed hundreds of millions of people in the process of trying to create their Godless systems of social equality. The Russian communists killed over one hundred million people. Chinese communists killed forty-five million. Pol Pot in Cambodia killed two million of His countrymen. North Korea is estimated to have murdered one million, six hundred thousand people (perhaps twice that many).

Nazi Germany, under Hitler, systematically murdered six million Jews and tens of thousands of other Europeans in their concentration camps. These figures do not even consider the death tolls from two world wars, Korea, Viet Nam and countless regional and ethnic conflicts in Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The sad truth is that humanity—apart from God—does not have the moral ability to rise above the sin and darkness we are born into. This is the world in which we live, and the world God offers to deliver us from through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus states that He came as a light to the darkness, but men love darkness more than light and rejected Him (John 3:19). He also said that whoever believes in Him would not live in darkness (John 12:46). Paul told the Christians in Colossae that they had been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13).

Once again, we see there is spiritual power behind this spiritual darkness. The hard truth is that every person is born into sin and spiritual darkness. That is the default condition of humanity. Each person's darkened soul requires the Spirit of God to bring the light of revelation to be set free.

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

Paul explains that Christians have a significant part to play in this dark-to-light journey in the lives of the lost.

But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Satan is the *god of this world*, and he blinds people with darkness so they cannot see God's glorious light. As mentioned, this is the default condition of humankind. In one sense, Satan has the advantage. Mankind is born spiritually blind and dead. He simply needs to work to keep them from the light. He perpetuates that blindness on people in many ways.

For many, they simply grow up in the ways of the world and never think anything different. Sins such as lust, greed, and the desire for power or control keep many from ever thinking about God because they do not want to give up their besetting sins. Remember, the demonic forces behind the world systems play to the lusts of men.

Others, who might be more inclined to religion, are offered a false version. The many religions and cults are simply the devil's smokescreen to keep people from the truth. Even those who would lean toward Christianity are not exempt. Many false doctrines, as well as entire cults, use the Bible. However, like Satan, they twist and misapply the scripture—as we have seen throughout this book. It worked with Adam and the Jewish nation so much that Satan even tried twisting scripture on Jesus when He tempted him in the wilderness. Peter warns of this tendency.

Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:15b-16

It is untrained and unstable people who twist the scriptures. The word *twist* carries an interesting word picture. Figuratively it meant to torture someone by placing them on the rack. The rack was designed to stretch people and pull them apart. The rack's victims had their arms and legs were tied to different boards, and a crank was turned to pull the boards apart. The more the cranked rotated, the more pull is exerted on the arm and leg joints until they were pulled out of the socket, tearing ligaments and muscles until they were useless. This word picture gives an idea of someone distorting the truth by stretching it out of proportion until it was beyond spiritual value. At the risk of repeating myself, I have to say, when I listen to some current preachers, I wonder if they have even read the Bible.

Satan's religious strategy is akin to giving someone a vaccination to keep them from getting the real disease. People get enough false religion to keep them from ever looking for the truth in Jesus Christ. In this way, Satan continues to foster the darkness people are born with.

Billions of people have grown up in cultures that know nothing about Christ. They follow the religion of their culture, be it Islam (1.8 billion), animism (400 million), Buddhism (448 million), Hinduism (950 million), or any other 'ism.' Satan's strategy was to control the culture and provide a false religious experience to effectively keep the Gospel from

people.

Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth-century Christian, physicist, mathematician, religious philosopher, and poet, said that every person had a God-shaped hole in them and that nothing, but God could fill that hole. In the absence of spiritual light, humanity's typical drive to fill the religious void will cause a person to seek a religious experience. Without the Gospel message, Satan finds the freedom to insert whatever false religious concept he desires.

It requires the power of the Holy Spirit to penetrate the demonic forces behind these religions.

The *Prince of Persia* still holds sway in the Middle East and other Muslim countries. That demonic power did not cease to exist when Persia stopped being the dominant world power. We can also assume a Prince of India, or China, or the USA, with their corresponding downline of demonic authorities. Each of these will have its own civic, cultural, and religious ideologies depending on who was instrumental in developing the societies in the beginning.

Of course, it is difficult for individuals and even small organizations to make much of an inroad against these tremendous demonic world views. Only when the Church turns its collective effort to focus on these principalities and powers will the darkness be broken, and multitudes brought to faith in Christ.

Currently, we are seeing a tremendous move of God in the Muslim world. Stories of Muslims having dreams of a man in white calling them to follow Him are numerous. Reports indicate that Iran has the fastest-growing Christian population in the world. Why is this? Did this just suddenly happen? Or was there something behind this spiritual ingathering we do not often consider?

In 1990 the CEO of Partners International, Luis Bush, coined the phrase 10/40 window. It indicated the geography of the world between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. This part of the world held the largest amount of unreached people groups, such as the ones mentioned above. For several years, the Church was encouraged to pray for the 10/40 window—with few tangible results. Ten years later, we began getting reports of miraculous encounters Muslims were having. In 2017 it was estimated that six million Muslims are converting to Christianity every year, which is about twelve per minute. Obviously that number is growing in 2021. The power of united prayer across denominational lines was finally able to pierce the darkness and allow for a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit—but it took a concerted effort over time.

Let's go back to the demonic strategy for a minute. Others have left the Church, wounded by so-called Christians and clergy who used and abused them. Effectively they are blinded

to the truth, considering their experience to be the only valid one. They associate bad religion with a bad God and want nothing to do with it anymore.

With some, Satan uses drugs, alcohol, sex abuse, and other traumatic experiences to shut people down. Often, he whispers, “It’s all God’s fault.”

One thing that shocks and saddens me is the amount of anger that seethes in our younger generation, especially in America. We have a massive percentage of pre-teens that are so angry they need counseling, and depression among teens is skyrocketing. The teen suicide rate in the USA has gone up over 50% in the last decade.

This is a spiritual problem, not just a psychological one. Satan uses the hopelessness young people see in the world to kill them before they get the life-changing gospel message.

We must get the power of the Gospel to this generation. It is not in the modern cookies-and-Kool aid youth programs that are so prominent in the Church today. We find it in a power encounter with the Holy Spirit—the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Real salvation, the power of the Spirit, and Biblical discipleship are necessary to save the next generation of the Church from falling into the spiritual darkness waging intense war against them.

The first responsibility of evangelism is not sharing the Gospel, it is praying against the darkness that blinds people’s minds. It is coming against the demonic principalities and powers that control geographical regions, the world systems they influence, and the people that are blinded. Specifically, we need to pray for individuals to see through the darkness of this world and accept the light of God.

I once spent over an hour explaining the gospel story in detail to a man who said he wanted to hear. I went through the Bible stories, explained sin and death, shared how and why Jesus died to save us. When I finished, he simply said, “I just don’t SEE it.” I had not yet broken the demonic strongholds that existed in his mind. I am pleased to say he did make a profession of faith years later, shortly before his death.

Paul specifically prayed this very thing for the Ephesian Church—and no doubt all the churches He worked with.

... making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. (Ephesians 1:17-18).

We will be much more effective in evangelism if we can identify and deal with the demonic powers and lies that keep individuals, geographical regions, and entire people groups blinded to spiritual truth. I am not suggesting we run to extremes like some in the

charismatic and prophetic movements have done, calling everything a Jezebel, Python, or Leviathan spirit. While we do not have to know the personal name of every demon, we should be able to discern—by the gifts of the Holy Spirit—what demon powers we are dealing with, so we can effectively combat them in the Spirit.

Paul said I do not run with uncertainty nor fight as one who beats the air (1 Corinthians 9:26). In effect, Paul said, I have a purpose, and I do not waste my time punching something that is not there. I have a strategy, and when I throw a punch, it lands on the chin of the devil.

Has the Church been shadow boxing? Have we spent a lot of time, money, and effort without really landing a lot of punches? Are we rescuing the lost or just entertaining them in captivity? Are we piping music to the blind—or restoring their spiritual sight?

In Galilee, Jesus introduced His ministry in the Synagogue with a quote from a familiar passage in Isaiah chapter 61.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Luke 4:18-19

We should see this same anointing operating in our ministries and churches regularly. You should see this same anointing working in your life. Jesus emphatically stated the things He did we would do—and greater things—because He was going to the Father and sending the Holy Spirit. The Church is the Body of Christ on earth, and it operates in, and with, the same anointing Jesus had on earth.

Jesus passed another torch to His Church. He was the light of the world. He placed that mantle on you and me when He said, “You are the light of the world...” Our job is to penetrate the darkness because we ARE the light. The only way light does not win over darkness is if the light is hidden. He did not say you should be, could be, ought to be, or might be, the light. He said, you are the light. The light shines or is hidden. Those are the only choices we have. What would it mean for the Church to shine the full light of Christ into the darkness of the world? What would it mean for you to let your light shine in a more significant way?

Defeating the spiritual darkness in this world means shining the light of the Gospel in its face. You can imagine the result that will have. Have you ever turned on a light in a dark room? The response of those in the room is, ‘Hey, turn that light off.’

The light hurts the eyes of those who have long been in darkness. Their eyes are not adjusted, and the light caused discomfort. Such is shining spiritual light in the secular darkness of this world—be it an individual, a group or a nation. They simply do not like

the light at first.

If you shine the light, you can expect persecution. Remember, they crucified Jesus, the true light of the world. Jesus said they would treat His followers the same. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. These were the people who had a corner on the God market. They were the chosen people. They claimed to be expectantly waiting on their Messiah. Yet, when He came, the darkness that had engulfed them kept them from seeing who He really was. He was the light, but the light hurt. They chose to try extinguishing the light by crucifixion.

What was this darkness that blinded much of the priesthood and the Jewish nation? If we can discern the cause of blindness, we will be more prepared to combat it in our lives and the Church. I believe that some sections of the Church today are experiencing similar issues.

First, there was a false interpretation of their scriptures. They expected a King-Messiah to defeat the Romans and restore Israel as a sovereign political power. This is obvious from the question of the disciples the day He ascended. *“Will you now restore the Kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6) Even after they had spent three years and one-half years with Jesus, they still had not overcome the idea that it was about a physical nation and a political kingdom. If the original apostles were still struggling with the concept, what do you think the general Jewish population believed? A false expectation blinded them.

Next, they substituted man-made doctrine and tradition for scripture.

Jesus said they had made the word of God ineffective by their traditions (Matthew 15:6). Their tried-and-true system of religion became more important than the Word of God itself.

Most people do not realize that the Ark of the Covenant was never in the second temple in Jesus’s day. The Holy of Holies was empty. Yet the priesthood carried on the temple’s day-to-day religious requirements and the annual sprinkling the blood on the Day of Atonement as if God’s presence were there.

The danger of maintaining religious rituals without the manifest presence of God remains significant for Christians today.

Third, they had turned to political power as a means of control. During and after the Maccabean period, about 150 BC, the High Priest’s position could be bought by the highest bidder. By Jesus’s day, the High priest was appointed—and removed—by Rome. Men had usurped the holy priesthood for financial and political purposes. Of course, the High Priest would have had to agree to work with the Roman government—at least behind the scenes.

Furthermore, the Sadducees controlled the position of the High Priest. The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocrats of Israel. They were legalistic, adhering only to the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not accept the prophets as being from God. They did not believe in spiritual things, including angels and demons, heaven and hell, and life after death. A decidedly non-spiritual approach to God ruled in the temple leadership. Today, politics and a flesh-focused, religious expression have replaced the Spirit of God in many churches.

These three critical issues perpetuated the blindness of the Jewish nation. They remain a threat to the Church today. Many indications would point to the fact that the westernized version of Christianity mirrors the attitudes of many first-century Jews.

We now need to turn our attention to another issue.

The Bible made it abundantly clear that there is a hierarchy of demonic principalities and powers that rule in the world's unseen realms. Furthermore, it indicates that these principalities and powers are also territorial or geographical in their power structure. Daniel references this fact when the angel visits him after twenty-one days of prayer and fasting. Read the story in Daniel chapter ten. The angel tells him a demonic being called the *prince of the kingdom of Persia* fought against him for twenty-one days before Michael the archangel came to his aid. The angel said he had to return to the battle, but after that, the Prince of Greece would come. The Greek empire under Alexander the Great defeated the Persian empire and ruled until the Roman Empire rose in power.

The truth is there are demonic forces that hold great influence over geographical areas—until those principalities and powers are defeated. Sometimes you can feel the stronghold these powers have on a place when you move toward them. I lived in a town that had been home to a State Mental Hospital since 1885. Many (not all) of the residents through the years had demonic issues. When those people died, the demons they hosted did not die with them. They were released into the geographic area and went about seeking new people to harass and indwell. You could often feel oppression and depression. People told me they could feel it too when they were about forty miles outside of the town driving towards it.

It has been my observation that demons operate within territories created by men's geopolitical boundaries: like countries, states, provinces, counties, and towns. The narrative in Daniel seems to bear out this truth of demonic, geopolitical dominion and influence.

It has been observed in the USA and elsewhere globally, the power of these demon princes can be broken. Sometimes missionaries would try for years and never make an inroad, and suddenly—it seems—the door is thrown wide open, and hundreds if not thousands for people turn to the Lord.

I was part of a mission organization started by my good friends Richard and June Bartz. Southeast Asia Mission Teams (SeaMisT) was dedicated to training workers to plant churches in eleven Southeast Asian Countries. They have been highly successful over the years.

One story I was privileged to be a part of involved reaching the Aeta people on Negros Island, Philippines. The people lived in great poverty and darkness. Some groups had tried to go in and were always rejected. They even killed some, as the Aeta were known as violent drunks. The Governmental official in charge of the region told our missionary Rodel that he could not get any churches to go into that area. That changed when Rodel went to the tribe, and God opened the door for him to preach the Gospel.

The Chief (who was the grandson of a famous witchdoctor) and his leaders got saved at the first meeting. Soon many Aeta were getting saved, and Bible studies were set up. In four years, the Aeta had their own Church organization registered with the Government (The Aeta Tribal Church of the Philippines), several church buildings, and Bible studies in different villages. They also had a Bible college that had 18 students in the first graduating class. That story started with a prayer to send laborers into the field and a \$35 offering I gave to send Rodel to the Aeta the first time.

While I do not have time to tell the stories, I encourage you to read the testimonies of places in the USA where Christianity uprooted demonic powers and established a recognizable Christian presence. The story of Tulsa, OK, and Colorado Springs, CO are two incredible stories. The Transformation Series of videos relates amazing stories of cities worldwide controlled by witchcraft, drug cartels, poverty, and many other things. When local pastors and churches joined in sustained prayer to break the demonic strongholds in their cities, the Spirit of God transformed them.

We can no longer afford to ignore the spiritual battle of darkness that exists all around us. The Church must pierce this shroud of spiritual darkness to allow individuals and even regions and nations to receive the Gospel message.

The title of this chapter is This Present Darkness.

Satan's goals and strategies often remain the same, but his tactics are not static. They change and evolve as the world has gone through significant political, social, religious, and philosophical changes in the past two thousand years. From the printing press in the fifteenth century to the worldwide impact of the Internet in the twenty-first century, technological advances have changed the way humanity relates to one another. Do not think that Satan is not in lockstep with these world-changing ideas, events, and inventions.

We can look back—especially over the last 500 years—to see trends in philosophical

thinking that ended up in global political movements. The Renaissance brought Europe out of the Dark Ages. While good and necessary in many ways, it nevertheless opened the door to secularism that would come.

The Age of Reason (1800s) promoted secularism and rational thinking as a scientific rather than a superstitious, metaphysical, or spiritual approach to life.

The early 20th century exploded with modernist thinking bringing the world into a new urban-industrial mindset, replacing the rural, agricultural one. As people began migrating to the cities, the worldview of the people also migrated.

Post Modernism replaced modernism. Post Modernism resulted in the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Antiestablishment was another philosophy that dominated western universities that were becoming more and more liberal. Today the dominant thinking of the secular crowd is that individualism is the most important factor in society. The current liberal groupthink that someone can simply self-identify as something different than they are, is one example. A biological woman can simply say she is a man, and that becomes a reality. The rest of the world is required to ignore biological reality and agree without question that this is true. Failing to accept as normal anything someone wants to claim will generate hatred and persecution. Soon—without a significant spiritual awakening—it will produce legal consequences.

Of course, I am leaving out a few evolutionary steps in secular philosophy progression that have brought us to the twenty-first-century secular mindset. However, the specifics are not the main point of this chapter.

The principalities and powers of this present darkness have laid out a master plan of secular thought that has brought a large part of the western world to a place where they think God is no longer relevant to individuals or society. The modern liberal narrative is that religion is wrong because it oppresses free choice and self-expression (sin) in people.

According to this liberal philosophy, religion is outdated and archaic, holding back society with its morality and self-indulgence restrictions. When this ungodly worldview gains enough momentum to tip the culture away from Christianity, we will see significant effort to shut Christianity down entirely in that society.

It is essential to look at history to understand an important fact. From the early days of the Church, the gospel message impacted first people, then families, then cities, and finally countries. So powerful and noticeable was the transforming power of the Gospel that the ungodly citizens of Thessalonica proclaimed, *“The men that have turned the world upside down have come to our city also”* (Acts 17:6).

While we rejoice that the Gospel spread through Europe, converting the heathen and barbarian, we also must recognize another trend. Inserted into the culture as a seed—

often one person or a small team of people acting as an apostolic-evangelistic team—the Gospel grew until whole societies tipped towards Christianity. For many years, these countries or regions operated, to one degree or another, as a Christian society. Yet, at some point, Christianity stopped influencing the culture because it became the culture. When that happened, the culture started slowly to drift away from its Christian moorings. Soon the Church grew lukewarm as the Church tried to stay relevant to the new ungodly trends of changing society. A lukewarm Church has no Spirit, and without the Holy Spirit it has no power to change lives or impact society. In these cases, Christian expression became dead religion mixed with old moral codes and rituals.

At some point, the Christiana message became optional and then irrelevant. The society continued its trend into worldliness and sin and away from all things God. The Church—made up of many of these increasingly secular-minded people—stumbled along, trying to stay relevant instead of being counter-cultural. Many genuine Christians in these churches were being slowly pulled away with the changing world views until the point came where the radical secular and Biblical worldview collided. A war (sometimes physical and emotional, but always spiritual) ensued for control of the country's cultural worldview.

History shows that the Church has never been good at fighting this particular battle. Country after country, turned upside down by the gospel message, ended up losing the Christian cultural influence that once defined it. The power of God rocked the Middle East and Asia. They are now under the control of an Islamic worldview. North Africa received the Gospel early on—but now persecutes Christians.

Italy, France, Germany, and other European countries were once overtly Christian—at least to the degree they understood it. France declared itself a secular nation in 1905. England and Scotland had significant moves of God. Then there was Ireland, turned upside down by St. Patrick.

Each of these countries reached a level of world power as they remained Christian, most notably England, which started the modern missionary movement. They all slipped back into relative obscurity as they fumbled their Christian legacy and power. One after another, the Spirit of God moved to another nation where the Gospel would be seeded and grow.

Currently, the United States has carried the gospel torch for nearly 400 years. The exact same trend has been happening, with the same result. Christianity dominated the founding of the nation and impacted culture for several hundred years. Slowly but surely, the demonic strategy played out, as we discussed above. Secular humanism slowly entered the bloodstream of American culture. Later, Marxism and Communism were added to the potentially lethal cocktail of the secular worldview. All these ideologies had one common goal—to get rid of God and any Biblical influence in society.

The 2020 election process in the United States brought the cultural revolution to a head. Secularism had finally gained enough ground that they could launch an all-out war on the Biblical worldview. As I write this in early 2021, anyone who dares to take a stand for Christian values will be loudly denounced as racists, bigots, and worse.

Bolstered by the election of their presidential candidate, the political left is already calling for the censorship of Christians. A prominent liberal news anchor says that Christians are not wanted in the public arena. It is becoming evident that anyone can say anything—no matter how absurd—unless it is a conservative Christian view. So much for the rhetoric about tolerance and unity. How did we get to the place in America—a country founded on the principle of freedom of speech—where Christianity is deemed destructive and repressive?

Unless the Christians in America wake up to what is happening, we will repeat the history of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Northern Africa.

Christians around the world MUST commit to change. Some Christians need to wake up see how much they have compromised. Others need to resign from the ‘bless-me club’ and get serious about making some personal sacrifices for the Kingdom of God. Still others need to get back to a first century expression of Church that emphasizes the Body of Christ and the ministry gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Many of the mainline denominations have moved away from any dependence on the Holy Spirit and have swallowed the lukewarm, culturally relevant poison that will kill them.

The good news is that The Spirit of God is moving powerfully in the Middle East, China, Southeastern Asia, South America, North Africa, and the South Pacific. However, these fresh moves come at great cost to the believers as they penetrate the darkness.

Church-as-usual will end one way or the other. You and I have a choice to make. We will either pierce the darkness or submit to the darkness. Either way, the Church as we know it will not be recognizable in a few years.

The point of this chapter is to help the reader realize that there is a demonic strategy to corrupt and blind the minds of an entire generation to the truth and reality of God. From the Garden of Eden until this hour, Satan has been at work to deceive and corrupt God’s greatest love—mankind.

There is a disturbing story in 2 Kings chapter 21 about a wicked king of Israel named Manasseh who defiled the temple and shut and locked the doors. He reigned fifty-five years. His son reigned after him for two years before he was murdered, along with his corrupt supporters. These two kings did much evil in the sight of God, worshipping idols and turning Israel away from the one true God. Eight-year-old Josiah is appointed king in his father’s place. Josiah is a godly king—insomuch as he could be. He followed the

ways of King David, restoring true worship to Israel.

At some point, Josiah orders the temple to be reopened, cleansed, and repaired after more than 60 years of neglect. During this renovation, a priest finds the Book of the Law in the temple. They take the book to the king, who realizes that they are not walking in the Lord's commands and orders steps be taken to reintegrate the teachings in Israel.

The point of this story is the Word of God was lost in one generation. Fifty-seven years to be exact. Could it be that Satan has been working to undermine the Word of God to blind and deceive an entire generation in the last days? He started 6000 years ago with, "Did God really say that?" That same sentiment echoes from liberal politicians, public educators, and celebrities—as well as many of our Bible colleges and seminaries today.

The current liberal social trend is to call the authenticity and authority of the Bible into question. They pay lip-service to it without giving it any power. Their tactic is to silence anyone who would refer to the Bible, calling them bigots, homophobes, racists, or just ignorant. Paul warned of these who had a "*form of godliness without the power of God.*" Jude called them "*clouds without water.*"

This is the present darkness that the twenty-first century Church is combating. We must see it for what it is and—by the direction of the Holy Spirit—form an effective strategy against it for the sake of souls. The godless are working hard to silence the Christian voice. We must not let that happen. We will suffer persecution, intimidation, and ridicule, but we must not give in to the demonic strategy of hiding our light because of fear.

There is one teaching Jesus gave that sums up both the warfare and the victory strategy. It is high time the Church stopped the historical trend of losing the cultural war years after they had initially won it.

Jesus taught the disciples:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:10-12

Placing the Beatitudes into the context of the spiritual/cultural war we have been discussing changes things considerably. The last one reads right into our current situation

and moves us quickly to the point of the battle and the strategy for victory.

Jesus assumes the world will persecute and slander His followers. It is not *if* you will experience persecution. It is a matter of when. Notice the nature of the war. You will be persecuted because you stand for righteousness. They will revile and falsely accuse you because of Jesus's name. Jesus said they would make all kinds of baseless accusations against you if you dared take a Christian stand. The demons hate Jesus, but Jesus is not touchable, so they go after the believers instead. As the old saying goes, if you cannot stop the message, stop the messenger.

Interestingly, people do not mind too much if you talk about God. Most people believe in God to some degree. However, mention Jesus, or pray in Jesus's name, and things change rather quickly. The reason is that there is one name given under heaven whereby men might be saved. The demonic forces in charge of the world systems do not like that name. It is in Jesus's name they are defeated—and they know it.

This onslaught against Christians is witnesses around the world. Over fifty countries today are hostile to Christianity. Evangelism is illegal, and a believer could face prison or even death just for having a Bible or sharing the Gospel.

Western Christians face a different kind of persecution. Freedom of religion (which relatively few people enjoy around the world) is eroding. Hate speech laws are aimed at silencing the Biblical teaching concerning homosexuality and other moral issues. In late 2020 we saw even more significant measures to silence, not just Biblical concepts, but anything that does not line up with a liberal, leftist agenda. This year, the liberals have worked hard at labeling everyone that does not go along with their false narrative as bigots, racists, hate-mongers, homophobes, and idiots.

The idea is that if you disagree with them, you are a hindrance to society. Some have warned that failing to go along with the leftist agenda would come back to haunt people in terms of employment, social acceptance, education, and opportunity. This sounds exactly like the pressure applied in communist countries.

Given enough power, they will try to force Christianity out of the public arena. Ultimately, they want to eradicate Christianity completely. This statement is not an exaggeration. We already see many countries with this agenda. Satan does not want people to get saved. On the other hand, genuine Christianity limits the erosion of society and places a check on sin. Remember, it is the spirit of the world that promotes and empowers sin and corruption.

The apparent strategy of Satan is to silence the Church. Are you being silenced? Will you be silenced? Remember, Satan comes as both a serpent and a dragon in the Bible. The snake is a smooth-talking deceiver, and the dragon brings persecution. These are the two

strategies the Church of the twenty-first century must discern accurately. We must not be silent even when the world is yelling in our faces to shut up. We must not run for fear because of persecution. Trust God.

Those who wanted to stop the gospel message threatened the apostles with beatings, imprisonment, and even death. The Christians' response was phenomenal. They prayed—not for safety—but for boldness to preach the gospel message with miraculous signs attending the preaching. They refused to be silenced, and they refused to run. They knew that only a miraculous presentation of the Gospel would pierce the spiritual darkness and save souls. The Church must return to that mindset today.

The modern secular worldview in the United States and other westernized nations embodies what Isaiah prophesied:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20

We see this in the news all the time now. Any perversion is applauded, while any stand for morality is scoffed. The world has taken control of entertainment, education, and politics. There is a constant effort from every corner to re-educate this generation, from normalizing the occult to teaching grade school children about sexual perversion. To call this out and take a Biblical stand invites persecution.

I believe that parts of the Church have been so focused on their own blessings and victories that they have been sidetracked from the greater battle around them. God has a global—dare I say cosmic—agenda. It is more significant than anything going on in my life. Certainly, God wants to work in your life, but as a smaller part of a larger plan. We must get our eyes off ourselves and onto the eternal purposes of God—which are much greater than merely getting souls to heaven.