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1

AWAKENING TO A DIFFERENT WORLD

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-4

The fanciful tale of Rip Van Winkle surfaced posthumously in the papers of New York gentleman Diedrich Knickerbocker. Reflecting the region's Dutch heritage, Knickerbocker crafted a yarn about the work-averse, henpecked man named Rip Van Winkle. Rip lay down while squirrel hunting (his favorite activity) in the Kaatskill mountains. Not prone to vigorous activity and dulled by liquor, Rip fell into a deep sleep.

Twenty years later, when he woke up, he didn't realize he'd slept more than one night. But signs around him shouted he was in a

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whole new world. His snowy beard stretched a foot long. His dog, Wolf, had disappeared. His previously well-oiled rifle lay inoperative, encrusted with rust.

When he entered the village outskirts near his home, he didn't recognize it. His familiar haunts had disappeared, replaced by newer, larger buildings. The people dressed strangely and looked at him, with his twenty-year-old clothing, with suspicious curiosity. Bands of children hooted at him as he trudged the streets. Nothing looked the same. Rip's hometown held odd names, strange faces, and unfamiliar sights.

Many American believers today are having a similar experience. Maybe we haven't been physically asleep for twenty years, but we've been culturally asleep for forty. Insulated in our Christian subculture bubble and disconnected from the secular world, many of us have been largely unaware of society's movements. But events this past year awakened us. With our eyes wide open, we realize America's changed. As I mentioned in the introduction, the culture war is over—and we lost.¹

With the battle decided, all that remains—as *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat says—is “the terms of our surrender.”² Those terms are still being negotiated, and two options exist. One choice means agreeing to disagree, peaceably coexist, and tolerate the other groups sharing our American turf. This is a plausible view, and *USA Today* columnist Oliver Thomas supports it.

We may long for the day when people become more accepting of one another, but achieving that end by forcing people to violate their own conscience tears at the already frayed cords that bind us together as a nation. Call me Pollyanna, but I believe we can have equality for gays and lesbians *and* religious freedom. Contraceptive coverage for women *and* liberty of conscience. (italics original)³

This is a preferred approach, and it reflects the principles

of freedom America was founded on. But as Douthat aptly observes, a second option is emerging: eliminate negotiation and force conformity. Wielding a painful but effective legal hammer, cultural activists silence believers' voices and dismantle any intrusive elements of the Christian subculture. We won't be invited to the table or called to peacefully coexist. Instead we're commanded to sit on the edges of society or risk punishment, lawsuits, and loss of our tax-exempt status. Douthat grimly states, "Now, apparently, the official line is that *you bigots don't get to negotiate anymore.*" (italics original)⁴

Another conservative commentator—Erick Erickson—agrees with Douthat in his blog post "You Will Be Made to Care."

There will be no accommodation between gay rights activists and those seeking religious freedom to opt out of the gay rights movement. Gay rights activists demand tolerance for their lifestyle, but will not tolerate those who choose to adhere to their religious beliefs . . . Evil preaches tolerance until it is dominant and then it seeks to silence good. We are more and more rapidly arriving at a point in this country where Christians are being forced from the public square unless they abandon the tenets of their faith.⁵

While some Christians who kept their ear to the ground will support Erickson's conclusion, I recognize there are many others who—for a variety of reasons—remain skeptical. Perhaps your life hasn't been affected by the changes. Maybe you adopt the posture of the citizens of a state where I once lived: Missouri. You say, "Show Me."

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Let me present four game-changing developments that have already occurred. These aren't the only significant changes, and they certainly won't be the last. But as I write these words and survey the landscape, these are among the most important shifts.

ABANDONMENT OF BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

It's impossible to overstate the impact of the abandonment of biblical marriage. For all of America's (and humanity's) history, marriage has been defined by the biblical parameters: one man and one woman. This is God's design and, despite efforts to question the historic interpretation of the data,⁶ it remains exegetically impregnable.

Ironically, our government passed the Defense of Marriage Act (HR3396; DOMA) in 1996 as a proactive measure ensuring traditional marriage remained the law.⁷ DOMA established the federal definition of marriage as one man and one woman, and it passed in anticipation of Hawaii legally sanctioning same-sex marriages. Federal lawmakers feared this would create complicated issues for other states should a gay couple marry in Hawaii, move, and demand their marriage be recognized by the new state.

To subvert this complication, the bipartisan majorities of Congress passed DOMA, establishing no state or territory of the United States would be required to recognize any marriages outside a union between one man and one woman. President Bill Clinton signed the bill on September 20, 1996. A casual observer might assume this ended the debate.

Hardly. Gay-rights activists challenged the law, and the case (*United States v. Windsor*) eventually reached the Supreme Court in 2013. There, in a landmark 5–4 decision with Justice Anthony M. Kennedy joining the four liberal judges on the bench, the court overturned DOMA, rendering it null and void. The ruling declared that gay couples married in states where gay marriage is legal must receive

the same federal health, tax, Social Security, and other benefits that heterosexual couples receive. In an unusual turnabout, Bill Clinton praised DOMA's demise. He wrote, "In 1996, I signed the Defense of Marriage Act. Although that was only 17 years ago, it was a very different time. In no state in the union was same-sex marriage recognized, much less available as a right, but some were moving that direction."⁸

Notice the cultural change Clinton acknowledges occurred in just seventeen years: "It was a very different time." A few months later, Bill and Hillary Clinton issued a joint statement. "By overturning the Defense of Marriage Act, the court recognized that discrimination towards any group holds us all back in our efforts to form a more perfect union."⁹

With this reversal by the Supreme Court, state legislatures rushed to pass laws legalizing gay marriage. Using the court's ruling as a legal barometer, some states—most notably on the West and East coasts—immediately sanctioned same-sex marriages. Others found their DOMA laws challenged in court, with activist judges granting temporary rights for gay couples to marry. When legal appeals from five states (Indiana, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin) reached the Supreme Court in October of 2014, the Court refused to intervene, effectively striking down gay marriage bans in those states and paving the way for six others to enact same-sex marriage. The ACLU called the action "a watershed moment for the entire country."¹⁰

The Supreme Court has not yet tackled the issue officially, but the strong message is that gay marriage could soon be legal across the country. In 2002, it was illegal for same-sex couples to marry anywhere in the country. At the writing of this book, over half of Americans now live in states that affirm gay marriage. Most legal experts expect the Supreme Court to soon accept a case that would settle the issue on a national basis. As it is, the recent refusal of the

Court to hear cases related to same-sex marriage opened the door to judges' ruling on gay marriage in several states.

How will this change affect believers holding a biblical view of marriage? We'll still be allowed to maintain and practice our "old view of marriage," but we won't be allowed to criticize gay marriage. Proof can be seen in several events that gained national notoriety. If we speak out, we'll be publicly vilified.

Brendan Eich found this out in a curious way. Eich, founder and CEO of Mozilla (maker of the Firefox browser), donated \$1000 to support California's Proposition 8 ballot initiative affirming marriage between a man and a woman. This proposition passed with 52 percent of the vote, declaring gay marriage illegal in California. This was the sum of Eich's so-called crimes. He led his company with integrity and, according to other leaders at Mozilla, never displayed offensive behavior.

OVER HALF of all Americans now live in states that affirm gay marriage.

With the Supreme Court's abandonment of DOMA, California leaders chose not to defend Proposition 8; they immediately legalized same-sex marriages. Gay activists went on a witch hunt and discovered Eich's financial contribution to Proposition 8.

The website OkCupid decided to boycott Mozilla and called others to do likewise. The wireless company Credo Mobile gathered thousands of signatures demanding Eich's dismissal and put pressure on Mozilla's board of directors. After a few days, Eich resigned from his position and quietly stepped away. His resignation and job loss weren't because of incompetency but due to pressure from gay-marriage proponents who found his support of traditional marriage offensive.

Some called for a continuing purge of those opposed to same-sex marriage. Though written satirically, William Saletan's remarks in *Slate*

clearly express the sentiment of many. He writes, “Some of my colleagues are celebrating. They call Eich a bigot who got what he deserved. I agree. But let’s not stop here. If we’re serious about enforcing the new standard, thousands of other employees who donated to the same anti-gay ballot measure must be punished.”¹¹ Then Saletan upped the ante.

Thirty-seven companies in the database are linked to more than 1,300 employees who gave nearly \$1 million in combined contributions to the campaign for Prop 8. Twenty-five tech companies are linked to 435 employees who gave more than \$300,000. Many of these employees gave \$1,000 apiece, if not more. Some, like Eich, are probably senior executives. Why do these bigots still have jobs? Let’s go get them.¹²

Eich’s resignation isn’t an isolated incident. My hometown of Chicago witnessed a similar uprising in 2012 when Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy expressed personal support for biblical marriage. Chick-fil-A had announced plans to build its second Chicago store in the trendy Logan Square neighborhood, but when Cathy’s remarks became public, politics took center court.

Alderman Proco “Joe” Moreno went on record that he would block the company’s efforts to build a store in his district: “If you are discriminating against a segment of the community, I don’t want you in the 1st ward.”¹³ Moreno gained the support of Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel who said, “The alderman has the ideological support of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Chick-fil-A values are not Chicago values. They disrespect our fellow neighbors and residents. This would be a bad investment, since it would be empty.”¹⁴

Neither Dan Cathy nor Chick-fil-A had discriminated against anyone in their employment practices or policies. Cathy only expressed a personal belief in biblical marriage. But this view is unacceptable to the broader culture. Far from being tolerant of contrary

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opinions, gay activists will seek to oppose and silence voices supporting traditional marriage. Be forewarned.

Todd Starnes of Fox News sounds the alarm: “They [the gay rights community] not only expect you to accept their lifestyle, but they also want you to affirm it. They want your children exposed to it in their public school classrooms. They want private business owners to endorse their court-sanctioned ‘marriages.’ And woe be to any person who dares object.”¹⁵

Erwin Lutzer declares, “The day of the casual Christian is over. No longer is it possible to drift along, hoping that no tough choices will have to be made.”¹⁶ Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, sends the same message: “There will be no place to hide, and there will be no way to remain silent. To be silent will answer the question. The question is whether evangelicals will remain true to the teachings of Scripture and the unbroken teaching of the Christian church for over two thousand years on the morality of same-sex acts and the institution of marriage.”¹⁷

EROSION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The second game-changing trend is the erosion of religious freedom. Nothing is more precious to Americans than freedom. The Statue of Liberty stands boldly on the shores of our nation proclaiming to the world that this is the land of the free. For over two centuries brave American soldiers have fought and died to protect our freedom.

While this liberty includes political freedom from totalitarian rulers, our nation’s founders also ensured that it included religious freedom. The first line of the First Amendment in the United States Constitution is, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

But over the past few decades, religious freedom has been erod-

ing. A Pew Research study rates the United States at a moderate level of restrictions in religious practices compared to other countries. In addition, the study indicates there's been a "marked increase" in hostility toward religion since 2009.¹⁸ Since religious freedom and persecution operate in a converse relationship with each other, this guarantees tough days ahead for believers.

"THE DAY of the casual Christian is over."

Congress sought to establish protection and parameters for religious freedom over twenty years ago. In response to a 1990 Oregon case (*Employment Division v. Smith*) that eliminated the requirement that government justify burdens on religious exercise imposed by laws, President Bill Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). This prohibited the government from burdening a person's exercise of religion unless there was a "compelling interest" by the government; and stated that a burden was the "least restrictive means" for enacting a neutral law to achieve said interest.

In other words, the RFRA was designed to protect the free exercise of religion while recognizing that certain activities under the guise of religion (e.g., murder, rape, assaults, etc.) aren't permissible because the government has a compelling interest in prohibiting them. This is reasonable, and no believer would argue against that premise. If a person claims their religious beliefs are being violated by a government regulation, RFRA requires a court to apply "strict scrutiny" to determine (1) if the religious beliefs are sincere, and (2) if the government has a genuine compelling interest in imposing the burden.

Despite the RFRA, our government continues to claw away our religious freedoms. One contemporary example is the Affordable Care Act (2010, ACA). Buried in the weighty web of new regulations is a mandate for employers to provide comprehensive contraception coverage in their employees' medical plans. This mandate includes

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all forms of contraception—including those understood to be abortifacient. To obey the ACA required Christians—who believe life begins at conception and must be protected—to compromise their beliefs. The governmental agency administering the ACA, Health and Human Services (HHS), provided no exceptions.

Religious groups, most notably the Roman Catholic Church, objected to the mandate under the provisions of the RFRA and were granted an exemption. But it created a serious ethical dilemma for other Christian-owned businesses who didn't qualify as religious organizations. Hobby Lobby, a chain of for-profit craft stores with 13,000 employees (owned by a family with evangelical beliefs), faced either the violation of the owners' religious beliefs or a \$1.3-million-a-day fine for failing to comply. The company filed suit against the government (*Hobby Lobby v. Burwell*) using the legal tenets of the RFRA as its defense.

In June 2014 the Supreme Court voted 5–4, with Justice Samuel Alito writing the opinion. Hobby Lobby prevailed and gained the ability to follow its religious beliefs without penalty. While this case represents a victory for religious freedom, it was a narrow victory. The court specifically limited the ruling to closely held corporations with owners who have sincere religious beliefs. It cannot apply to other believers who share similar objections but not the narrow window. They will be forced to comply with the ACA despite their beliefs.

On the state level, the trend is also clearly pointing to further erosion of religious freedom. When a 1997 Supreme Court decision ruled RFRA inapplicable to state laws, states began enacting their own versions of the RFRA, including Arizona in 1999. In early 2014 the Arizona state legislature passed an amendment to RFRA (SB 1062) allowing businesses involved in public accommodation the ability to use RFRA as a defense if they were sued for discrimination. It didn't allow for greater discrimination, as falsely reported; it simply provided defendants with sincere religious beliefs the ability

to appeal to the state's RFRA in a lawsuit.

The gay rights community immediately applied intense pressure to Arizona governor Jan Brewer; they condemned the bill as anti-gay and discriminatory. The National Football League added economic pressure, threatening to move the Super Bowl from Arizona if the amendment became law.¹⁹ Major corporations such as Apple, Delta, and American Airlines voiced opposition.²⁰ Caving to the pressure, Governor Brewer vetoed the bill.²¹

In the wake of these religious freedom issues are believers facing painful decisions. Owners of any public business, be it a bakery,²² a florist,²³ or a photography studio,²⁴ will be forced to decide if they'll put their values on a shelf, close up shop, or prepare for a lawsuit.

Brian Walsh, executive director of the American Religious Freedom Program, gives this warning: "There have been decades of assurances that if same-sex marriage becomes law, it would not restrict religious freedom. A lot of people took those assurances at face value. I would say those assurances are being called into question."²⁵ George Neumayr predicts, "It will be the death of religious freedom by a thousand little cuts here and there; cancelled speeches of religious figures at state universities, lost HHS grants, the refusal of city governments to recognize churches that don't permit gay marriages, 'hate crime' legislation that extends to opposition to gay marriage, and so on."²⁶

PROTECTION OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Unlike the previously mentioned changes, the protection of special interest groups—specifically the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) community—is an avalanche just beginning. When this wave reaches full strength, its impact will be far-reaching.

The issue is the practice of discrimination. The Bible strongly objects to sinful discrimination based on external appearances (e.g., James 2:1–13). American church history is replete with spiritual justification

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for the enslavement and abuse of African Americans. We must not repeat those tragic sins.

But despite efforts to equate the discrimination against the LGBT community with the enslavement of African Americans, the issues are fundamentally different. While there's nothing sinful about having black or white skin, the Bible says homosexual behavior and changing one's gender is wrong—an affront to the Creator (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26–27). Yet in the near future, laws could require churches and religious nonprofits to hire gay and transgender individuals—or face a lawsuit. Gordon College, an evangelical school in Massachusetts with a policy forbidding homosexual practice for students and staff, has been warned its policy may run afoul of accreditation standards. Gordon president D. Michael Lindsay, citing the importance of religious freedom, noted that faith-based colleges must have the freedom to “set the conditions for community life.” The accrediting agency responsible for evaluating the school requires institutions to pursue “nondiscriminatory” policies in employment and other areas of campus life.²⁷ Gordon has been given a year to “review” its policy. Emboldened, other accrediting agencies may enforce similar standards on other Christian schools across the country.

Federal lawmakers are being pressured by the White House to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). This proposed legislation would make it illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. The Senate passed the ENDA, but the law has remained stalled in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. In light of the Hobby Lobby decision, some LGBT leaders have withdrawn support for the ENDA, wanting it to be reworked to eliminate religious loopholes.²⁸ It appears that, while the passage of the ENDA may not be imminent, at some time and in some form it will pass.

In July of 2014 President Obama signed an executive order (amendment to orders 11478 and 11246) with more limited reach.²⁹

The order bars federal contractors from discriminating against employees on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. It doesn't include a religious exemption, despite calls from Catholic and evangelical leaders. Therefore, any religious organization with federal contracts cannot require employees to abide by their faith's teachings, which compromises the organization's spiritual integrity.

The resulting cultural collision greatly exceeds the stir caused by the ACA. As schools, churches, and nonprofit religious organizations with federal contracts consider new employees, they can't discriminate against those involved in a gay lifestyle or who surgically changed their gender.

HOSTILE ATTITUDES TOWARD CHRISTIANITY

If you're under age forty, it may not seem like the culture has significantly changed, but in the eyes of those in our forties, fifties, and beyond? It's been dramatic. I entered into vocational Christian ministry in 1983 after college and seminary. Back then our culture still embraced and promoted biblical values—at least officially. You could identify yourself as a Christian, publicly pray in Jesus' name, and hold Bible studies on college campuses.

Now the environment is hostile. Now we are told our views aren't welcome. Now we're hated. We're lumped into the same bigoted, narrow category as Donald Sterling, the former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers. Researcher George Barna, in his book *Futurecast*, writes, "Americans are becoming more hostile and negative toward Christianity."³⁰

John Dickerson correctly noted that the size of the evangelical church is much smaller than some have projected. Multiple surveys peg the number of evangelicals in the range of eighteen to twenty million³¹—roughly 5–6 percent of the population. With an increasingly shrinking minority status, Christians are being ordered to leave

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the room and take their Bible talk with them.

At the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, a professor of criminology named Mike Adams was hired and gained promotions and tenure while he was a self-described atheist. In 2000, he had a radical conversion to Christ and became outspoken about his faith. Despite strong evaluations and two faculty awards, Mike was denied promotion to full professor in 2010. After a four-year fight in the courts, a US District Court judge ruled in his favor and required the university to not only promote him but also award him \$50,000 in back pay.³²

At the United States Air Force Academy a cadet started a firestorm by writing Galatians 2:20 on the whiteboard outside his room: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Complaints were lodged and Mikey Weinstein, director of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, pressed the case against the cadet. "It clearly elevated one religious faith (fundamentalist Christianity) over all others at an already virulently hyper-fundamentalist Christian institution. It massively poured fundamentalist Christian gasoline on an already raging out-of-control conflagration of fundamentalist Christian tyranny, exceptionalism and supremacy at the USAFA."³³

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Can you detect hostility in those words? It's raging. And it worked. Two hours after the complaints were received, the cadet's commanding officer ordered him to remove the verse. Ironically, the same brass that removed the Scripture verse and denied cadets participation in Operation Christmas Child with Samaritan's Purse allowed the Academy-approved cadet Freethinkers Club to sponsor "Ask an Atheist Day."³⁴

At Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama new military recruits can no longer be personally given Bibles by the Gideons International Bible Society. This practice, in place for over a decade, allowed Gideon volunteers to shake hands with new recruits after they finished their required paperwork and offer them a pocket-sized Bible. Volunteer Michael Fredenburg said, “They kicked us out. They told us, ‘get your Bibles out.’”³⁵ They now allow a display table with materials, but they prohibit the personal distribution.

The Bible disappeared from the POW/MIA Missing Man Table at Patrick Air Force Base in Florida. The Missing Man Table, established to honor the plight of military personnel who are missing in action or prisoners of war, includes a white tablecloth setting with an inverted glass, a plate with lemon and salt, a single rose, a candle, and a Bible. Each element was outlined in the official ceremony brochure. In early 2014 someone objected to the Bible and it was removed. The Air Force explained why:

The 45th Space Wing deeply desires to honor America’s Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA) personnel. Unfortunately, the Bible’s presence or absence at the table at the Riverside Dining Facility ignited controversy and division, distracting from the table’s primary purpose of honoring POWs/MIAs. Consequently, we temporarily replaced the table with the POW/MIA flag in an effort to show our continued support of these heroes while seeking an acceptable solution to the controversy.³⁶

Examples abound of students at all levels of public schools encountering hostility for praying or carrying Bibles to school. In one instance, two middle-school sisters carried their Bibles to

IT’S PAINFUL for me to admit that the country I love has radically changed.

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school and their teacher confiscated them and called the girls' mother, threatening to turn the girls over to Child Protective Services. When the mother arrived at school the teacher threw the Bibles into the trash and said, "This is garbage!"³⁷

The growing hostility against Christians, Christianity, and the Bible is evident across the country. Starnes reports countless stories:

- A Sonoma State University student must remove her two-inch-tall cross necklace because her supervisor believed it would offend other students.³⁸
- A first-grade student in North Carolina is ordered to remove the word *God* from a poem she was supposed to read on Veteran's Day in honor of her two grandfathers, who served in Vietnam.³⁹
- A New Jersey school district banned all religious Christmas music, requiring every song at their winter concerts to be secular.⁴⁰
- An Army email labeled pro-family Christian ministries as "Domestic Hate Groups," listing them with the Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazis.⁴¹
- Evangelical pastor Louie Giglio was ousted from the 2012 presidential inauguration program because he delivered a sermon in the 1990s calling the practice of homosexuality sin.⁴²

These aren't isolated stories—they're part of a national trend. Hundreds of stories could fill this space.⁴³ It's painful for me to admit that the country I love has radically changed, and the pace of change is accelerating. Followers of Jesus who awakened from a cultural sleep are facing hostility, rejection, and marginalization. The trend lines point to increased opposition—including genuine persecution.

Since persecution is on our future menu and we need to understand it, I will explain in chapters 3 through 7 what the Bible teaches. But first let's examine how America arrived at this place.