

The Biblical Basis for Christian Optimism (I)

By Andrew McColl, 27/11/2012

And He was saying, 'the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows-how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come' (Mk.4:26-29).

I grew up on a farm in central-west NSW, where every year we would plant and harvest wheat. Ideally, we would sow in May and harvest in December. After we would sow, there was little that could be done with those paddocks but to wait. Wheat being what it is, it would germinate and grow to maturity, given the right conditions of rainfall.

You could walk out to the wheat paddocks and jump up and down and shout, but the wheat wouldn't respond to that; it wasn't made to. It responds most of all to rainfall and heat, so most farmers tend to watch the weather forecasts closely to see how things are likely to progress. Growing wheat is an expensive process requiring a lot of investment, but it is founded on good fundamentals that are essentially timeless.

The concept of sowing and reaping gets lots of attention in the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments. Concerning Israel, God said through Hosea, that "they have sown the wind and they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; it yields no grain" (Hos.8:7).

Because sowing and reaping has multiple applications in spiritual, moral and economic spheres, it is important for Christians to consider what we're doing in terms of sowing and reaping. This applies to individuals, to families, to businesses, to churches, to communities and to whole nations. We are fools if we think our present personal and national state has no relationship with what has happened in the past, or with what is likely to be happening decades, or even generations from now. Everyone sows, and everyone reaps.

We are where we are today in the West for instance, because of what we have been sowing now, for centuries. Many knowledgeable people will attest to the fact that the West is not doing well, and that it could get a whole lot worse. I believe it will.

Why is this? Beginning more than three hundred years ago, the West began to quietly but steadily adopt this idea: *We Don't Need God*. So, there has been a steady progression away from an acknowledgement of God, affecting all areas of life. This applies to education, to lawmaking, to social behaviour, to taxation, to political and governmental policies, even to what we do in church. In fact, there really isn't an area of human behaviour unaffected by the West's theoretical and practical abandonment of God.

I have become very sceptical about Christians who are enthusiastic about pouring lots of resources into bringing about political reform. Why? Because the Bible warns us about the

inability of man to save himself. Politics and government are areas of legitimate activities which the Bible has much to say about, but unless we go much deeper than mere political reform, we end up having only ever put lipstick on a very dirty pig. Lots of effort and money, for hardly any result. The Bible actually warns us: “stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; why should he be esteemed?” (Isa.2:22)

Ron Paul was an outstanding individual Congressman, but he would be the first to acknowledge his utter inability to bring about any real change in the US. Why? Because the people don't want change. They think they can go on getting something for nothing, but they can't.

If we Christians really want lasting change in the nations of the world, we have to go much deeper than politics. We have to begin with individuals, families and churches, because these are the real building blocks of any healthy nation. Speaking of his work as an apostle, Paul said that “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (I Cor.3:6).

He also spoke of “admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col.1:28). Why “every man?” Because men are individuals. They also (generally) have a wife and children that they are responsible for. Furthermore, men (according to scripture) are the elders of churches. They should be ruling the show. And if individual men are attending to their responsibilities well, there will be harmony, growth and peace.

Bricks are boring things, but without bricks, there is no building. You want a wonderful brick house? You'll have to give lots of consideration to the role of bricks.

No healthy church will stay that way without healthy families, so one of the first tasks of a good pastor is to teach his people about the family, beginning with husbands and wives. I think there is a year's Bible teaching for people here coming in off the street, beginning in Genesis 1. Start with the Christian couple, then move onto the children.¹

But even the family is secondary. To what?

To the law of God. It is the law of God which establishes the family, which is why we must begin in Genesis.² But while ever the church is utterly disparaging towards the Old Testament law, we continually shoot ourselves in the foot, rendering ourselves incompetent and incapable of facilitating real social change. If we don't read and follow all of the text book, how will we ever be effective?

What did God command Joshua? “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7).

And what was it that the Psalmist promised in Psalm 1 would be the key in making the godly man prosperous? Meditation in the law, day and night.

¹ See Andrew McColl, “They Shall Become One” (2008), and “The Significance of the Godly Family” (2009).

² See Gary North, “The Dominion Covenant,” 1987.

What was it that king Josiah discovered about 620 BC, that prompted him to urgently begin the process of reformation in Judah? It was the law (II Chron.34:14-33). The scripture says of Josiah that “before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (II Kings 23:25).

The apostle James (in the New Testament) described God’s law as “the royal law,” and “the law of liberty” (James 2:8, 12).

If we want to rebuild we have lots of work to do, reassessing our attitude towards God’s law, and seeing the godly family and the church re-established in the community. There are no short-cuts for these, and we will have to put up with a lot of social nonsense in the gestation period, which could be decades-even generations.

But it’s time to begin to sow again, and this time, to sow the correct things that God always intended for His people. Then, we may just be able to “reap in joy” (Ps.126:5-6), as individuals, families, churches, communities and nations begin to thrive again, under the blessing of the Almighty. And that’s the true basis for Christian optimism.

The Biblical Basis for Christian Optimism (II)

By Andrew McColl, 4/12/2012

Christian optimism is legitimate when the church begins to deal properly with the Biblical fundamentals: God's Word and Law, the family and the church. Our failure in the west over 300 years has been because we fled the field on these issues. So, our success will result from obediently addressing these issues.

The growth in Christian homeschooling over the last generation which is continuing, is one positive result from this. Christian families, viewing the poor standards of the public school system, began to re-consider their attitudes to education in the light of scripture. As a result many thousands over time (in Australia alone) have decided to either withdraw their children from public education, or never send them there in the first place, preferring instead to give them a Christian education at home.

This has made a significant difference to those individual families, and it has the capacity in the long-term to make a difference in the church and the community as more and more Christian families home educate their children. Something exciting has begun.

What happened? Families discovered that education is a parental responsibility according to the law of God (Deut.6 &11), and is a subject raised in scripture as far back as the time of Abraham (Gen.18:19).

They realised that State education meant the steady inculcation of a humanistic world view, godless teachers, and a godless peer-group, for 14,400 hours of a child's life. All of these things were in direct violation of scripture. Whoops!

So good education is something much more than simply having a chaplain at a State school, or even taking children out of that State system. It is a matter of obedience to God.

This is something that has the capacity to transform the church, in the long-term. As a result, it is a source of optimism to me. Not only did we home-school our children, but I am actively involved in encouraging home-schooling through my business, Hebron Homeschoolers, and the associated website, www.hebron.com.

In all of this, two important things are happening. Firstly, Christian children have been removed from the clutches of a manipulative, godless, humanistic State and are given a Christian education at home. Secondly, Christians are becoming aware that the law of God has all manner of application to daily affairs, including education.

We have sayings for this kind of phenomena: "from little things, big things grow," or "every long journey starts with a few small steps." There are scriptural sayings, too: "Who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech.4:10) And this one: "The smallest one will become a clan, and the least mighty one a mighty nation. I the Lord, will hasten it in its time" (Isa.60:22).

Now, if God's law applies to our children's education, what else does it apply to? How about law, government, economics, taxation, foreign affairs and defence? Any applications to these?

Well, yes, there are. Lots actually, and they must be recovered, too. And as Christians gain the confidence and authority from such successes as homeschooling (along with saving the taxpayer \$14,500 per child, per year), we will be emboldened to broaden the front of Christian influence in the community.

So in the process, Christians are opening the scriptures and finding out that God's Word (in both Old and New Testaments) speaks to their daily issues, in fact to all of life. The scripture tells us that "I shall run the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart" (Ps.119:32).

All of this means one very positive and powerful thing steadily takes place: Christian individuals, families, businesses and the church become dominant in the community, not through force of arms or political power, but through obedience to God's Word. This is the very thing that God promised in Deuteronomy 28 could take place. This should be making believers optimistic about our future.

It's time to get on board for a glorious ride, founded in obedience to God's Word. Are you ready?

The Biblical Basis for Christian Optimism (III)

By Andrew McColl, 11/12/2012

Optimism is essential for people. If people don't believe that their works today have relevance, meaning or purpose, this will destroy their desire to do anything. Why get out of bed? Research documents this fact. Paul pointed out that "...the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops" (I Cor.9:10).

We have to have a reason for what we do. Today, I'm going to work, and I hope to get paid for it next week. I don't go because I love my boss, or the work, or my work companions, though these factors certainly do make it easier. It is the prospect of monetary reward in this work that drives me. I am "plowing in hope," and there is nothing wrong with that.

The motivation for other forms of Christian service is similar: not necessarily the prospect of monetary return, but that there is meaning and purpose in an endeavour requiring our labour. This leads us onto something else:

A social movement that wants to significantly change society, must have some core components:

*1) It has to believe in the real possibility of **positive social change**.*

*2) It has to believe it has the specific tools to bring about that change: **a unique doctrine of law**. Men need to believe in their ability to understand this world, and by understanding its laws, change its features. They need a detailed program for social change, in other words.*

*3) There is another feature of a successful program of social reconstruction which is usually present, and which is undeniably powerful: **the doctrine of predestination**.³ They have to have good reason to believe that history is on their side.*

The Bible provides all these things for Christians. We do believe in the possibility of positive social change, that the scriptures give us a unique doctrine of law, and that God is always powerfully at work accomplishing His plan. God is on our side, regardless of the obstacles or trials we may seem to be facing.

These three things ought to be a source of great encouragement for believers. They were designed to be an encouragement. If God did not have a perfect, all-encompassing plan for humanity, we could be excused for entertaining pessimism. But He has completely provided for His people.

What to do now?

³ North, G., "Unconditional Surrender," 1995, p.361-2.

The Bible says that “he who watches the wind will not sow, and he who looks at the clouds will not reap”(Ecc.11:4).

Samuel Rutherford once said, “Duties are ours, events are the Lord’s.” We cannot predict exactly what the interaction between tomorrow and our labours will result in, but what we can do, is behave obediently and responsibly, and trust God to bring about the results.

The ten spies who entered the promised land and brought back a negative report knew about points 1, 2 and 3. In fact, they were those who had been the first recipients of the law of God from Mt Sinai in Exodus 20. Their response? “It can’t be done. It’s too hard.”

Can we afford to wait for the optimum circumstances? Not really. The circumstances of today may not be glowing, but are they this way because of us Christians failing to sow?

All of the great men and women of the Bible at some point faced daunting circumstances, which in human terms seemed hopeless. But they did something that the ten spies were unwilling to do: they believed that God was much bigger than their circumstances, and was able to lead them to triumph regardless. And they were right!

So, the Christian response ought to be one of optimism, concerning the faithfulness and the promises of God towards His people, and His great desire to use them in this world He created.

Are you optimistic about this and if you are, what are you doing about it?