

Reversing the Church's Decline

By Andrew McColl, 2014

1.

Any society which has explicitly or implicitly rejected the Ten Commandments is already in sharp decline. Reversing that decline will require radical action on the part of society's most important institution, the Church. The Church must be stopped in its tracks, and go and find its Biblical foundations, all over again. That may take a generation or longer to accomplish, but otherwise we'll just continue on the same old slippery slope to irrelevance, oblivion and judgment.

The Old Testament prophets didn't have an easy task going to Israel with their message from God. From Moses onwards, there wasn't a lot of love lost towards them, because they were perennially confronting a nation determined to head into sin, idolatry and depravity. And when Jesus came with His message from God concerning the kingdom of heaven and His command to repent, despite the thousands of miraculous public healings, the resurrections from the dead and events such as the feeding of the five thousand, Israel found a way to have Him tried, condemned and executed.

What does this tell us? It's a fact of human nature that people (including religious people), really don't like being confronted and challenged to change. They very commonly find some way to either ignore the messenger, rationalise his message, or just get rid of him.

We cannot ignore human nature, for only God through Jesus Christ can change that. What we have to do is what prophets have always done: confront people with the perennial messages of repentance and the ethics of the kingdom of God. God requires the ethical faithfulness of His people to His covenant, but the wages of sin is death. There will be a lot more pain, if we don't change, now.

Change has to begin somewhere, and it certainly can't be nebulous, or merely a matter of good intentions. Noah and his sons needed a lot more than good intentions over 120 years, to build the ark. I believe change in the Church will have to begin with four things:

- 1) A recognition that the 6-day Creation is foundational to the Church's belief.
- 2) A re-discovery of the importance of God's covenant with His people.
- 3) A re-appraisal of God's law, and the absolute necessity of its application today.
- 4) A tremendous growth in believers in personal, family and church responsibility.

All of this will require communication, discussion/debate and time. But the longer we leave it, the worse the Church and the world around us will get. The fate of the world for better or worse, is inextricably tied up with the state of the Church, because Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth..." and "You are the light of the world..." (Mat.5:13-14).

The decline of the Church for hundreds of years now has been very serious. God helping us, it won't be terminal. We're like men on the deck of a burning ship in a vast ocean, with no ship in sight, no means of communications with the world, and no life-rafts. If we can't put these doctrinal and theological fires out, we'll go under. Thus we have a great imperative to get moving and working for dramatic but constructive change for the better.

Of course, there would be a huge proportion of people today in the Church who would respond saying, "What's the problem?" That approximates the attitude of Lot's sons-in-law, when he told them of the impending destruction of Sodom (Gen.19:14).

We have to confront the sin, the compromise and the failures of the Church over many generations, for it's been God Who has been smiting His Church and bringing us to so many humiliations of late. We cannot expect Him to relent in this process, until we get busy effecting serious change and reform.

And if there are some who would say, "Look Andrew, the Lord Jesus would never do that, because He loves us so much, and He only does good to His people," I need to remind them of what the Bible says:

Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel up to plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they were not willing to walk, and whose law they did not obey? So He poured out on him the heat of His anger and the fierceness of battle... (Isa.42:24-25).

And from the New Testament,

Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off (Ro.11:22).

Conclusion:

I'm fond of the saying attributed to the Chinese: *Every great journey starts with a few small steps*. If the Church will respond to God in repentance and obedience, and start the challenging but rewarding process of getting its house in order after so many years of decline, there is a hope and a future for us.

We would be foolish to leave this to those who are today's leaders. The Reformation wasn't begun by men who were part of the era's status quo. Those who have led us into crisis, will be the last ones who know how to get us out of it. Thus there is a great individual responsibility on believers (as at all times), to take up the challenge of personal obedience and faithfulness to God.

Will each of us be a part of the problem or part of the solution?

2.

It's always the intention of God when there's been a period of decline, to clean up and straighten out His Church. How do we know this? Because the Bible tells us that He wants to "...present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Eph.5:27).

This is an aspect of the mandate that Church reformers have always had. In fact, it serves as an encouragement to all godly leaders: we've got to get God's house in order.

Hezekiah sought to do this. He was a political leader, and when his father Ahaz had died, he saw the great need to rebuild the house of God. "In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." Then, he brought in the priests and the Levites and said to them, "Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place" (II Chron.29:3, 5). Later, the scripture says of him that

Every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered (II Chron. 31:21).

There were many others in the Old Testament who after a period of decay, were determined to enact reform. Immediately after Hezekiah's godly reign, Judah returned to its apostasy, during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. But Amon was replaced by his godly son Josiah.

Though becoming king at the age of eight, after being encouraged by the prophetess Huldah, Josiah sought to reverse the dreadful practices enacted by his father and grandfather. This remarkable king

Stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered the covenant (II Kings 23:3).

After his two evil predecessors, Josiah had a massive task ahead of him of reformation and reconstruction. He spent a long time breaking down altars, smashing sacred pillars and getting rid of mediums and spiritists: all the aspects of idolatry that had been set up before him. But after his death, God brought judgment upon Judah, sending her into captivity.

You would think that Hezekiah, Josiah and others knew something of the coming Messiah. When He came, Jesus instructed us to "... seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mat.6:33). He also indicated that "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness" (Mat.13:41).

The kingdom of God involves standards: His standards, based on His Word and His law. God's grace and His standards are not opposites. We need God's grace in order to live up to His standards.

Jesus Himself established the conditions of friendship with Himself. He said that "You are My friends if you do what I command you" (Jn.15:14). Thus servants of the Lord have to reject the foolish notion that they can be everyone's friend. If we're going to be faithful to God it just won't happen, because in God's service we'll tread on toes. James warns us that "...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

When God called Jeremiah, He declared to him "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer.1:10). Any prophet has to confront the evil in his own heart, and then elsewhere.

Conclusion:

The Bible encourages us that "...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Ro.14:17). Cleaning up God's house will require the persistence of His people, along with a plan, and tools to carry out the task.

It is time for the Lord to act, for they have broken Your law (Ps.119:126).

3.

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isa.62:6-7).

If we Christians believe that the Church needs a massive cleanup before it can be truly effective in the world, we'd better be ensuring we're getting before the Lord in prayer about it.

Why is this? Because there are certain things we can do, but we'd better be making sure that what we're doing really is of the Lord, for He is no respecter of persons.

We must kneel before God and ask His grace and power else nothing of His shall be accomplished. Even the best of the works of man will result only in further decline of society. Just as the symbolism of the Nazirite was primary of ceasing from the works of man and trusting in the work of God, so must we begin with such an attitude. But such an attitude must necessarily then fall at the feet of God in request that He act to advance His kingdom. Don't expect any political, social, or even ecclesiastical or

family program to be blessed of Him if it does not first originate with humble supplication to Him.¹

It is God Who is always at work amongst His people. We are obliged to join with Him as co-workers in what He's doing. We commence that through prayer.

Those activities in the Church and the world that are not from God, have to be brought to the light. We are commanded to "not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph.5:11). And that begins with the prayers of believers.

God speaks throughout the Old Testament of the tabernacle and the Temple as "My house." Our Lord in Matthew 16:18 speaks of "My church." As against this, in Matthew 23:38, our Lord refers to the Temple as "your house." When the sanctuary or church becomes man's, it is doomed, because God will move against it.²

There is hope for the Church, if it is willing to obey Christ and embrace godly change. And change is necessary if we are to get into and stay in the main-stream of God's purpose. The scriptural pattern is that blessing always follows obedience.

Thus says the Lord, "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it, for there is benefit in it,' so I will act on behalf of My servants on order not to destroy all of them. I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; even My chosen ones will inherit it, and My servants will dwell there" (Isa.65:8-9).

The scriptural promises are great, but they require the active participation and faithfulness of God's people. The last thing we can afford to be as believers is like spectators, watching a sports game. The Church was never to be like that. God warns us that, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

Conclusion:

The prophet Habakkuk witnessed a lot of things in his era that were common to our own. But he was confident of this one thing: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab.2:14). And at the beginning of the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk, he prays. My marginal reference says:

Lord, I have heard the report about You, and I stand in awe of Your work, O Lord; in the midst of the years revive it. In wrath remember mercy (Hab.3:2).

Whatever else we will need to do for the Church to be reformed, it will begin with prayer. Will you begin to join with me and other believers, asking that the Lord will "Revive His work, and in wrath remember mercy?" We pray for encouraging outcomes, just as the Psalmist did:

¹ Joel McDurmon, "In the Midst of your Enemies," 2013, p.29.

² Rousas Rushdoony, "The Gospel of John," 2000, p.23.

O Lord God of hosts, restore us; cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved (Ps.80:19).

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5.

Salvation is not an escape from obedience, but rather it emphasises obedience, as well as sacrificial devotion and service. This idea of salvation without obedience was born out of pagan rebellion.⁵

Jesus’ ministry meant getting His hands dirty with people, for over three years. This was a challenging assignment for the Son of God. He was assigned to be with people, and it was people who later took His life.

A successful church has to be mixing with people in the community. Yes, the gospel involves words, but it also involves the actions of godly people, because words without actions are meaningless. When barriers get between the Church and locals for whatever reason, it quickly becomes ineffective.

Every church needs forms of community interaction to be effective; we’ve all got to be getting our hands dirty with people—that’s a vital aspect of Christian ministry. There are

⁵ Paul Michael Raymond, “Tyranny, Independence, or Liberty Under God,” in “Faith for all of Life,” September/October 2011, p.18.

innumerable ways to do this of course, but it's amazing how food can bring people together, because we all need it.

Stephen is well-known as the first martyr in the New Testament, but we don't always make the connection between the facts about him. He was a powerful, confronting, miracle-working preacher whose ministry began through ministering to widows who were being "...overlooked in the daily serving of food" (Acts 6:1).

We have to begin with the blunt facts of life: people need food to live. When someone shows they can successfully provide what is needed to sustain others bodily, it logically leads to the establishment of credibility. Have they got what it takes to sustain me spiritually as well? Establish credibility with food: then go to the next thing, which is hearts and souls; lives.

It's remarkable the emphasis placed on food right throughout the Bible, and what can take place around the meal-table, and we Christians shouldn't underestimate this. This can be on an individual and family basis. Or else it can be when the church gets itself organised, opens its doors and begins to provide a meal or food to those who'd like it.

This sort of thing requires a core group of people who have a vision to work, and serve people, because there is a lot of work involved. But with some encouragement and individuals who will make time, it can become a wonderful opportunity for Christian service.

Of course, you have to procure the food, cook and serve it. Then you have to clean up afterwards, sort out the furniture, clean the floor and pay for the extra electricity. These are all the necessary nuts and bolts that need a core group of faithful workers to carry.

A local church has an activity each Thursday lunch-time, called "King's Table." They provide a 3-course meal to anyone who turns up, for free. They generally get 20-40 people who come for a meal, and of course they make sure they hear the gospel too. Most of the food is purchased very cheaply, and the food is generally prepared by church members.

I've gone along many times to help in the kitchen with doing dishes and serving meals to people. Of course, there is a lot of work to do in preparation and afterwards. Sometimes, I've been the person responsible to give a 3 minute gospel message when preparing to say grace. I pull no punches, but give it to them fairly straight and plain (but hopefully with love), stressing the fact that we are all sinners, and the necessity for repentance and faith towards God.

I think the gospel message is an essential component, and people don't mind; if they did, too bad. Food gets them in the front door; it's the bait on the hook, but the gospel message puts the whole thing in its proper perspective.

Who do you get? All sorts. Lots of poor people, a number of folk who are mentally deficient, along with people who just don't mind a free feed. Sometimes, you'd be surprised who turns up.

What's your church doing? If we want to reverse the church's decline, it won't be accomplished by a lot of naval-gazing. It will be accomplished by the power of God, and with the willing workers of the church, who don't mind ministering to needy people, often around the meal-table. And let's face it: there isn't a person on the planet that doesn't have needs, and everyone needs to eat.

God doesn't want to receive us in heaven like some bunch of narcissists, with clean, unstained, manicured hands. Our lives should be affected by people and their problems, because we want to help people, through the gospel. One way to do that is by feeding them. It can bring enormous credibility and respect for the church. If we can really help society by feeding people, how else could they see us helping them? And that's when it gets really exciting.

The vision of the gospel is not pie in the sky when you die, but the total transformation of society and nations through the transformation of individuals and families, by the Holy Spirit, through His Word. And it all begins, locally.

Conclusion:

The church is made up of people with pure, but imperfect hearts. But manicured hands, unstained by people? I don't think so. Our Saviour's ministry in John's gospel began with turning water into wine at a wedding, because the wine had run out. His mother identified the problem, He knew what was needed, and He provided it.

Let's take the opportunities that Father provides for us.

6.

A very big part of reversing the decline of the church, will be when Christians begin changing the way that we think. Why is that?

The way we've been thinking and acting has gotten us to where we are today. It hasn't been because of the devil, or the humanists or anyone but ourselves. You and I can blame other people for our problems till the cows come home, but that won't help us. We ought to be way past complaining like Adam did: that our sins are someone else's fault.

The Bible must be at the heart of a godly community. The great tragedy of our day is that we were the ones who went along with it being rejected. How did this happen?

There were a number of things. We in the church began to believe things that were off the page 500 years ago, such as "Old Testament law isn't for today," "You can't legislate morality," "Jesus could come back any time and take us all to heaven," and a host of other things.

None of this happened overnight. It's taken many centuries. But now we're faced with the same old problem: will we be part of the problem, or part of the solution?

What we know is that Christians need to be educated in the truth. This means the steady, patient development of a Christian world-view throughout the church, so that we know what we believe and why. Then we can start to act on it.

Yes, Rome wasn't built in a day, and that's applicable to now. But if we say that it's too hard and refuse to make a start, we simply consign ourselves and those who look to us, to the category of the ten unbelieving spies who returned from the promised land, saying "It's all too hard."

God didn't take kindly to those ten, because He killed them. He hates unbelief amongst His people, but He rewarded Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who believed they could take the promised land, and He hasn't changed.

Of course, there were problems in the way. Rome wasn't built in a day then, and it won't be now. It required a 40 year wait on their behalf, and then a whole series of fights to take the land. But after 45 years, 85 year old Caleb came to Joshua, recounted the long journey they'd been on since they'd both left Egypt, and then spoke the words of a man of faith:

Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day... (Joshua 14:12).

The vast majority of church leadership today would never admit it, but it effectively identifies with those 10 spies, saying "It can't be done." And those who follow them won't get it done. Why?

Because what Jesus said to Martha is still true: "Did I not say to you, that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (Jn.11:40). What does this tell us? Faith in God and His promises will either work for you, or unbelief will work against you. We can't have it both ways.

Where do you want to be when your body has returned to room temperature? A big part of the key for the future is the development and cultivation of a Christian world view of life: consistently seeing all of life (and that includes education, law, government and economics, to name just a few issues) from His perspective.

When the church gets serious about adopting of a Christian world view, and is able to communicate it effectively to the world, the world will finally have its opportunity to take notice. But this will require the participation of a committed group of individuals.

Ready to get on board?

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb.11:6).

7.

*Christians must accept that the decline in civilization is a theological failure first and foremost. The pulpits and the people need to repent and return to God's word to answer their worldview questions: sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, inheritance.*⁶

Construction of a grand building requires faithful adherence to the architect's plans. Depart from the designer's plans in some way, and you can't expect him to congratulate you and present you with a bottle of champagne.

I think that pretty much sums up where we are at today, in the church. As the prophet Haggai indicated to the Lord's people,

You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse full of holes (Hag. 1:6).

We cannot expect substantial improvement in the church until we begin to change in many, many ways. Changes will take time, and they could be painful for some, because it requires that we drop off a lot of false ideas and traditions that we've held onto for generations, even centuries. What are some of these?

The church has to understand what it really is: an essential aspect of a healthy community. This is because the Bible makes it clear that the family, the church and civil government are all essential components of a healthy society.

For too long conservatives have emphasised the family as being the centrepiece of society. But what is the family without the church to belong to? When the church teaches Biblically about the family, the family will be properly established in the community. But no community has much future if it doesn't understand the necessity of the church, and the church has to be functioning how God intended it to be. That means Christians have to be playing their part in the church.

I look forward to the day when every church in the land is filled to overflowing on Sunday. When ministers are confident, authoritative people, addressing the issues that are of great concern in the world, and of great influence in their community. These are all aspects of the promises of God.

"Where is that?" you say?

Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up

⁶ Joel McDurmon, "In the Midst of your Enemies," 2013, p.77.

to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us of His ways and that we may walk in His paths.” For the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa.2:2-3).

From God’s perspective, the house of the Lord is the most important place in the world. In Old Testament times, the house of the Lord was in Jerusalem. But the establishment of the New Covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ, was preceded by the stripping from Old Covenant Israel of the kingdom of God. At the conclusion of His Parable of the Vineyard, Jesus predicted to the Jews that

...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And He who falls on this stone will be broken in pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust (Mat.21:43-44).

So when Isaiah predicts that “the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,” he is not referring to geographical Jerusalem in Israel as we know it. He is speaking of the church, which is the city and people of God. Anyone looking for the Messiah apart from Jesus Christ is making a dreadful mistake, for as Peter explained on the day of Pentecost, “...God has made Him both Lord and Christ-this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

“The law going forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,” is really referring to the church becoming the predominant community institution, teaching and influencing the nations of the world. And if “all the nations will stream to it,” it will mean the international setting aside of beliefs and doctrines contrary to scripture, and a wholehearted turning to the God of the Bible.

...the Christian’s victory is one of principle moving by degree to complete realization.⁷

This is both an exciting but challenging prospect that we have to prepare for. It means Christians must be prepared to be social and community leaders, who know what the Bible requires, and are willing to teach and implement it. It means the logical and systematic application of the scriptures to all of life: law, economics, education, government and care for the needy.

Of course this is grand and bold, and a quantum leap from where we are today. But that’s the nature of the gospel. It is all-encompassing, because that’s the nature of the kingdom of God. So, we have to be prepared to both lift our vision much higher, and also to deal wisely and practically with the nitty-gritty issues of life that confront individuals, families and whole communities.

This will be a big part of reversing the church’s decline. Ready to put your hand to the plough? You’ll be amazed at what this will mean.

⁷ Raymond Zorn, “Christ Triumphant,” 1997, p.118.

Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is the house you could build for Me? And where is the place that I may rest?" (Isa.66:1).

8.

If there's been one thing that has plagued the church almost from its beginnings, it has been an inability to properly appreciate the law of the Lord. This is evident as far back as Paul's writings to the Galatians, where he confronted their willingness to believe the heresies of the Pharisees; namely, that we were to be justified by law, as opposed to grace.

This was one serious mistake to make about God's law, but not the only one. The much more common error which is still made today, was to relegate God's law to the category of obsolescence, as though it had little or no practical importance for today. This has frequently come about because of a complete misunderstanding of Romans 6:14. This text tells us,

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

How has this been misunderstood? Christians have viewed this text as some kind of licence for rejection of the Old Testament law, when in fact Paul never authorised this at all.

The rejection of God's law by the church, and then by the rest of the world, has led to the tacit acceptance of humanistic socialism as a legitimate political ideology, the waging of aggressive war with casualties on a scale never seen before in human history,⁸ the centralisation of power, government control of economies through reserve banking systems, the widespread introduction of graduated income tax, the abandonment of capital punishment, along with the legalisation of many perversions such as pornography, homosexuality etc.

Now of course there are aspects of Old Testament law that have been fulfilled in Christ, which do not require our action today. The laws of sacrifices of lambs, bulls and goats were fulfilled in Christ, for as John the Baptist so plainly explained, Jesus Christ was "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn.1:29)

Following on from this, we no longer have the tabernacles either of Moses or Solomon to bring sacrifices to, we no longer have the land laws pertaining to the tribes of Israel, the seed laws, or the laws pertaining to the exclusion of certain foods. How do we know this? After Jesus explained to the disciples that it is not foods that defile people, but what comes out of the heart of man, Mark indicated that "Thus He declared all foods clean" (Mk.7:19).

Christians will generally agree that the Ten Commandments are to form the basis of Christian social behaviour. But directly after the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, God gave Moses (in Exodus 21-23) what are sometimes called the Case Laws. These were built

⁸ See for example, Gil Eliot, "Twentieth Century Book of the Dead," 1972. Up till 1969, Eliot estimated that man-caused deaths in the twentieth century, could have ranged between 80-150 million.

upon the Ten Commandments, and give us logical and practical applications of the Ten Commandments.

For instance, we know from the Eighth Commandment that “You shall not steal” (Ex.20:15). But how is this to be implemented in society? God gave Moses specific instructions about this in Exodus 22:1-4, dealing with the issue of restitution: how much a criminal is to repay the owner of goods, when he is caught and convicted. Theft required at least double restitution, and in some cases four or five fold restitution. That would make conviction for criminal theft very painful, and so theft would be much less likely in our society under this law.

The Ninth Commandment (Ex.20:16) prevents us from bearing false witness against our neighbour. But what is this to mean? Exodus 23:1-9 explains this to us, warning that we must never “follow the masses in doing evil” (v.1). Having a majority on our side doesn’t mean our behaviour is therefore right before God.

The applications of the Case Laws are not limited to Exodus 21-23. There are further texts given to Israel (and to us) which explain just how the Ten Commandments were to be applied in society. These are mainly found in the other five books of the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy).

For instance, laws for the governing of the kings of Israel are found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Kings were to be subject to God’s law.

The story of the Good Samaritan which Jesus told (Luke 10:30-37), is really a New Testament version of the Case Laws. Jesus gave this parable, in response to the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbour?” (v.29) Thus my neighbour is not just the person who lives nearby. It is anyone who I may come into contact with throughout my day.

Jesus accepted the validity of the Ten Commandments and Old Testament law. In fact, he frequently quoted from them. Even His responses to the devil’s temptations (Luke 4:1-13) were directly from Old Testament law (Deut.8:3; 6:13; 6:16).

One of the proofs that the case laws are relevant today, is given to us through Paul. He takes the commandment given to Moses in Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and applies it to the payment of ministers of the gospel. Paul writes,

God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the ploughman ought to plough in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops (I Cor.9:9, 10).

What should be our attitude to Old Testament law? Unless an Old Testament command has been withdrawn in the New, it probably applies today. Thus murder (forbidden under the Sixth Commandment) has always required the death penalty, and nothing has changed today.

Reversing the decline of the church requires that we fundamentally change what we think about God’s law. It doesn’t mean that we’re going back to the law as a means of salvation,

for only Jesus Christ can save people through His grace. It does mean utilising God's law as a means of directing the behaviour of individuals, families, churches, communities and whole nations, which is what it was always meant to do, from the beginning.

Isn't it time we started?

Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart (Ps.119:34).

9.

Conformity may give you a quiet life; it may even bring you to a University Chair. But all change in history, all advance, comes from the nonconformists. If there had been no trouble-makers, no Dissenters, we should still be living in caves (A. J. P. Taylor).

Renewing the church's interest in the law of the Lord will lead to a renewed desire to ensure that children have a godly education, for passages of the law (such as Deut.6 &11) emphasise and command this from God's people.

The common, even prevalent notion amongst believers today, that it's legitimate to send the children of the godly to a State school, an institution fashioned and prepared to inculcate atheism, has no basis in scripture. God has a different view. He said of Abraham, that "...I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him" (Gen.18:29).

If we believe from scripture that God made all things in six days, and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in His image, that He has a purpose for each individual to fulfil in this life, and that He will order all our affairs to bring this about, this must be reflected in what we teach our children. To deny a child a godly education is to fail to prepare them for a life of service and dominion; it is an act of indifference, even hostility towards them, and to the God who gave them to us. And God will bring parents to judgment for this.

But if we believe that "Children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward" (Ps.127:3), then this will be powerfully reflected in both the content of our education, and its context.

What do I mean by context? It means where education is taking place. The Bible warns us that "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Prov.13:20). Thus to ask or expect a child to complete a godly education for 12 years to the age of 17-18, whilst sitting alongside the ungodly for 14,000 hours of their childhood, is utterly ridiculous. This was the baseless expectation that Lot appeared to have from his daughters whilst they lived in Sodom, and it's obvious from Genesis 19 how horribly wrong he was.

The fact is that “bad company corrupts good morals” (I Cor.15:33). So, Christian parents must remove children from the influence of evil company, if they really want to ensure they will be “like arrows in the hand of a warrior...” (Ps.127:4). The best way to do this is in the home, where parents can determine what they want children to learn and be exposed to.

Paul spoke of this home influence in relation to Timothy’s upbringing. He said that “I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (II Tim.1:5).

My wife and I began to do this 24 years ago with our children, and we’ve never regretted it. This option permitted us to utilise a godly curriculum for them in a supportive context, and to engage them from time to time in conversations, with a view to developing a Christian character and outlook on life. They also enjoyed the company of other Christian children.

Yes, this requires making bold and confident choices for our children’s sake, and going against the tide of a fallen society, but this should sit comfortably with the Christian conscience, for “...the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Prov.28:1). Over time, children understand what we do in making decisions on their behalf, they respect us for it, and then they begin to make such decisions themselves.

Why?

Because it’s been modelled for them at home. They follow their parent’s example, which is exactly what the Bible said they should be doing. Modelling is one of the first tasks of a teacher. It’s what Paul both taught and practiced: “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil.4:6).

It’s time Christians stopped being intimidated by the opinions of the ungodly. As Taylor also wrote,

There is nothing more agreeable in life than to make peace with the establishment- and nothing more corrupting.

Make bold choices for your children, ensuring they have a godly curriculum and peer-group in their formative years. It’s all an aspect of their discipleship, training them up in the way they should go. And they will bring joy to your heart in years to come, as our sons are doing today. It’s an important aspect of reversing the church’s decline.

The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honour and life (Prov.22:4).

Ready to be enriched?

10.

A massive factor in reversing the church's decline all around the world, will come with the restoration of the tithe. Faithful tithing on the part of God's people will enrich the church, and will simply give it the opportunity not only to employ ministers who can be furthering the gospel, but to engage in all manner of well-funded activities within the community.

It is certainly possible that Stephen and his six early church diaconate colleagues (Acts 6:1-6) were supported by the churches' tithes. This solid funding gives the church the platform to engage in welfare (which can be a form of evangelism in its own right, as it was with Stephen), and other forms of social influence and responsibility.

The fact is, there is no such thing as a free lunch. Everything has a price attached, and as the membership of the church understand the Biblical teaching on the tithe, and its utter necessity for the church's success and community influence, this will inevitably lead to the church's social power being restored in the community.

Tithing began in scripture with Abraham, when he gave a tenth of his spoils in battle to Melchizedek, who the Bible calls "priest of the most high God" (Heb.7:1). Abraham certainly never believed the modern, heretical notion of a sacred/secular dichotomy. And instruction regarding tithing continued throughout the law of God. It was thus the normal practice for the people of God to pay a tenth of their income to the priesthood. The priesthood thus became an institution of great social influence and power.

God considered the matter of the tithe to be so important, that He told the children of Israel that when they stopped tithing, they were robbing God (Mal.3:8-9). He said then that the restoration of the tithe would lead to not only material blessing, but to something of even greater significance. He said that "all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land" (Mal.3:12).

The tithe is no small thing for an individual, for it is a tenth of their income given to God. But the steady removal of the tithe from the church's normal practice, has been an aspect of the massive growth in taxation in the West. It's not simplistic to say, "Less tithing means more taxes."

How is this? God deals in His judgment with a people that robs Him of the tithe, by removing monies from them in another way. Their money is taken from them to fund atheistic, bureaucratic institutions, like the Departments of Social Security and Health, costing us ever so much more.

God doesn't have to send in the Philistines to conquer any more. He just lets parasitic bureaucracies grow in power the land. So, when we refuse to tithe anymore, that's no problem to Him. We then pay 30-40 percent of our income in taxation. The church forfeits its power in the nations to godless bureaucracies, and then wonders why no one seems to take any notice of it anymore.

It's God's way of saying to His people: "If you ignore what I have commanded you with the tithe, I'll let others turn the heat up on you and make life difficult, as a way of bringing you to repentance and obedience to My Word." He did this with Israel right throughout the Old Testament when they turned away from Him (see I Samuel 8), and the Bible says that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb.13:8).

Now what is the promise of God, when His people tithed properly to their local church?

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes, says the Lord of hosts. All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts (Mal.3:10-12).

All this can and will change, because "power flows to those that take responsibility." Tithing is an aspect of Christian liberty, but liberty cannot be present in a community where there's an absence of Biblically based personal and social responsibility. And the biggest aspect of this for the community, is Christians waking up to the facts of life as God sees them, including tithing.

11.

When are you going to wake up... and strengthen the things that remain? (Bob Dylan)

One of the most important decisions a Christian must make, is that of joining, participating in and strengthening a church. Why? Because God requires it of us. He said "I will build My Church..." (Mat.16.18), and so He requires us not to be spiritual Lone-Rangers, but to personally identify completely with what He is doing, in His Church locally.

The Church is a God-ordained institution, and we'd better take that seriously. Some will say, "I won't join a church, because the Church has so many problems." Well, at least the last part of the statement is true. There have been problems in the Church since it began, and they continue today. But in refusing to join, identify and submit to a church, people refuse to make the necessary contributions that are a part of helping the Body of Christ. They are effectively saying, "I won't join it, I won't be part of it, and I won't do anything to make it better."

But there's more. The person who won't submit to a church and its leadership is saying, "I don't need people around me." But there's no one like that. And the Bible's warning is that "...the rebellious dwell in a parched land" (Ps.68:6). Who wants that?

Anybody with much experience in working with people will agree: wherever there are people, there are problems; it's a fact of human nature. We will have problems around us till we die, and believing we can run away from our problems is merely avoiding reality. The challenge of being a believer is in dealing realistically with all the painful problems of life that arise, and they surely will.

Where do we begin?

1. Firstly, we have to acknowledge that the Church is an institution ordained by God, that He commands us to be a part of locally. He said that He'd build it (Mat.16:18), and He commands us "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together..." (Heb.10:25).
2. Secondly, we have to join the Church and submit to its local leaders. Paul commanded the Hebrews to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account" (Heb.13:15). You will need some encouragement or correction at some time in your life. Could you handle that?
3. Thirdly, we have to tithe to a local Church. That is God's command to us, and that's how the institution is supported. Ministers can't live without an income, and no charity (which is one of the Church's critical functions) operates without expenses. Everything costs. One way to stamp out the life of the Church is to successfully discourage its people from tithing. It will go down-hill fast.
4. We have to tirelessly work amongst the Church-God's people. Sometimes this will be paid work, but often it will be unpaid. Every church needs the majority of its people to be willing to work behind the scenes with little reward or recognition. Paul encouraged the Philippians, to be "...with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27).
5. We have to be optimistic about the future. Optimism is essential in any Christian work, and if we are doing God's will, we can ultimately expect His vindication on our activities. Jesus predicted that "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).

Conclusion:

The Church is like everything this side of heaven: it's a flawed institution. It's flawed, because there are people in it like you and me. But that should not prevent God's people from enthusiastically joining the Church, submitting to its rightful leaders, and actively participating and contributing to its life, its well-being and its expansion. These are only the beginnings of what we are to do, in our service of the King of Kings.

And with all its problems, the Church is an institution which has a great future, because it has received great promises from God. God has promised us that "the Lord will stretch forth Your strong sceptre from Zion, saying 'rule in the midst of Your enemies' " (Ps.110:2), and that "the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Mat.16:18). Furthermore, the Church will be "the joy of the whole earth" (Ps.48:2), and God is going to use the Church to display His great wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Eph.3:10).

If your team's not in the competition, you'll never win the championship. The Church is where our future lies. Wouldn't you want to be a part of that?

12.

God speaks throughout the Old Testament of the tabernacle and the Temple as “My house.” Our Lord in Matthew 16:18 speaks of “My church.” As against this, in Matthew 23:38, our Lord refers to the Temple as “your house.” When the sanctuary or church becomes man’s, it is doomed, because God will move against it.⁹

The devil’s work is always to corrupt the work of God with some form of humanism. Humanism can be theological, ideological, philosophical or behavioural. And in pitting himself against God right from the beginning, the devil has sought to confront God and steal what was His. So, all forms of corruption are evil in origin.

Jesus spoke of this, when He said that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (Jn.10:10). The devil cannot create, he can only corrupt. So we can expect that the devil wants to get his hands on the good things taking place amongst God’s people, and corrupt or destroy them.

This happened in the Garden, it happened with the giving of the Ten Commandments (Ex.32), when Nehemiah was trying to re-build the walls around Jerusalem (Neh.4, 6), and it happened in the life of Jesus, through the attempt by Herod to murder Him as a baby (Mat.2:12-23), the temptations (Mat.4.:1-11), the opposition of the Jewish religious leaders (Jn.11:47-57), and in their final collusion with Pilate to ensure His crucifixion (Jn.19:1-15). Wherever there is a work of God, the devil will be there to try to bring corruption/destruction to it in some way.

Wherever there are people trying to reverse the church’s decline, there may very well be some present hoping to perpetuate it. We really do need to “put on the whole armour of God...” (Eph.6:11).

Does this mean that every critic or challenger to godly people’s activities, will be from the devil? No, for godly people are like everyone. What they do will be flawed in some ways, and it is the interests of the kingdom of God that believers listen to those who have a loving but possibly corrective challenge to bring to them.

The Psalmist wrote, “Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon my head; do not let my heads refuse it” (Ps.141:5). Proverbs warns us that “...He who hates reproof will die” (Prov.15:10).

And if we want to strengthen the church, Christians will have to put the kingdom of God first, and remember to “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph.6:10).

13.

⁹ Rousas Rushdoony, “The Gospel of John,” 2000, p.23.

It's been amazing how we've been accepting it really, since about 1830. That was the year that a lady had a series of dreams or visions about the end of the world. Some people with a very limited knowledge and understanding of the Bible found some dubious texts that supposedly supported her experiences, and the rest has been history.

Faulty eschatology has become an integral aspect of the church's decline. When the church after 1830 gradually accepted the pre-millennial view of the coming of Christ and the end of the world, an idea that hardly ever been given any credibility for the previous 1800 years, it began to change the way Christians viewed the world, their role in it, and the role of the church in the world. This has been devastating for the church's impact around the world.

Why? Theology has consequences, because beliefs have consequences. If I believe something about God and the Christian life that isn't consistent with scripture, and proceed through life acting on those beliefs, it's going to bring me to drama and loss at some point; just what happened in the Garden.

Pre-millennialism is a theology and eschatology of pessimism, which ignores vast portions of scripture. It doesn't teach of a triumphant, victorious church which overcomes its enemies through the faithful preaching of the gospel, but warns that the days are only going to get increasingly darker, before the Lord has to suddenly return to rapture His church out of the mess.

Pre-millennialism is founded on a serious misunderstanding of portions of the gospels, and many other portions of scripture. Let's take Matthew 24. Matthew 24 (which is paralleled in Mark 13 and Luke 21), begins with Jesus explaining to the disciples, in relation to the temple buildings:

Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down (v.2).

Clearly, Jesus was speaking of some kind of destructive act that was going to take place in the future.

Later, on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying,

Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (v.3)

Then from v.4 to v.33, Jesus gives a lengthy, detailed prediction and description of events that are going to take place, then gave them (and us) a very important detail, in v.34:

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

The other synoptic gospels repeat this verse, in Mark 13:30 and Luke 21:32.

This brings us to an important question. Which generation was Jesus referring to, when He spoke of "...this generation?" Was it a generation in the distant future?

No. Jesus used the expression “this generation” some 20 times throughout the gospels. **And every time, He was referring to the group of people, living at the time.** Here are some examples.

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children... (Mat.11:16).

The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here (Mat.12:42).

For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some of them they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation (Luke 11:49-50).

Peter added to this on the Day of Pentecost, when he exhorted his listeners to

Be saved from this generation! (Acts 2:40)

What was it that Jesus was referring to when He predicted that “Not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down”?

40 years after Jesus’ prediction (in AD 70), the Romans soldiers under Titus came and destroyed Jerusalem, burning and destroying the temple. They’d had enough of the Jew’s rebellion against them, and every person in the city was either killed or taken away to be enslaved. This represented God’s righteous judgment against the nation of Israel, which had been chronically in rebellion against Him, ever since she had been delivered from Egypt. Jesus had repeatedly warned Israel about this, and one of the plainest of these was in Mat.21:33-46: the Parable of the Vineyard, which culminated with this frightening statement:

The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people, producing the fruit (v.43).

This is why it is important to understand that the Book of Revelation is not a predictive statement about the end of the world. On the contrary, it explains God’s judgment on Israel (and Jerusalem) in great detail. Without wanting to begin a whole new study, Revelation explains to us concerning God’s two witnesses that

Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified (Rev.11:8).

This could be no other city on earth than Jerusalem. Just like Sodom and Egypt in the Bible, it was about to be severely judged by God, and He’d use the Roman armies.

A Biblical view of eschatology will bring a healthy level of optimism to the believer, and this is important. Who wants to go to work, believing that their efforts aren’t going to be rewarded?

Optimism is essential in any Christian work, and if we're doing God's will, we can ultimately expect His vindication on our activities. How do we know that? Jesus predicted that

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).

He also promised,

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened (Mat.13:33).

Notice the all-encompassing nature of Jesus' promise? He said it would be "all leavened!"

There would be no place in the affairs of men that would not be totally transformed by the leaven of the kingdom of heaven. This remarkable promise should make every Christian confident that their work is going to be rewarded by God, and that there will be great social change in every part of the world, in response to the faithful preaching of the gospel by the church.

Conclusion:

Pre-millennialism has had a dreadful impact on the church, robbing it of optimism about our future, convincing millions that as far as being effective in the world was concerned, we would be a bunch of losers who had little to bring to our communities, other than a ticket to heaven when we die. As far as evil conspiracies is concerned, it's been successful, but it's time it was utterly rejected by the church, as a deception.

I prefer the godly, Biblical doctrine about the future known as post-millennialism, which I believe we see Jesus quoting in three of the gospels:

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The Lord will stretch forth Your strong sceptre from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies" (Ps.110:1-2).

14.

Christians can be confident that if the church has been in decline, God is seeking to restore it, and will be seeking those whose hearts are towards Him, to join with Him in its restoration. And restoration will entail dragging out of the house all the refuse and rubbish that has built up over generations, that God finds offensive. Every theological and behavioural aberration that has only led to confusion and chaos in the church: God wants it out of His house.

This means the church has to take up the painstaking process of examining what we believe and why, so that nothing stays in the place that shouldn't.

It is God Who is always at work amongst His people. We are obliged to join with Him as co-workers, in what He's doing. We commence that through prayer.

We must kneel before God and ask His grace and power else nothing of His shall be accomplished. Even the best of the works of man will result only in further decline of society. Just as the symbolism of the Nazirite was primary of ceasing from the works of man and trusting in the work of God, so must we begin with such an attitude. But such an attitude must necessarily then fall at the feet of God in request that He act to advance His kingdom. Don't expect any political, social, or even ecclesiastical or family program to be blessed of Him if it does not first originate with humble supplication to Him.¹⁰

A very big part of reversing the decline of the church, will be when Christians begin changing the way that we think. Why is that?

The way we've been thinking and acting has gotten us to where we are today. It hasn't been because of the devil, or the humanists or anyone but ourselves. You and I can blame other people for our problems till the cows come home, but that won't help us. We ought to be way past complaining like Adam did: that our sins are someone else's fault.

We really do have to see the church from God's perspective. This is one part of it:

Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us of His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa.2:2-3).

Today, the mountain of the Lord doesn't refer to geography. God is speaking of His people, the members of His church, who are to be His agents of reconciliation in the world, leading the world to Jesus Christ and His Word. This is how God's Word goes forth to the nations.

Reversing the decline of the church requires that we fundamentally change what we think about God's law. It doesn't mean that we're going back to the law as a means of salvation, for only Jesus Christ can save people through His grace. It does mean utilising God's law as a means of directing the behaviour of individuals, families, churches, communities and whole nations, which is what it was always meant to do, from the beginning.

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¹⁰ Joel McDurmon, "In the Midst of your Enemies," 2013, p.29.

service and dominion; it is an act of indifference towards them, and to the God who gave them to us. And God will bring parents to judgment for this.

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Conclusion:

Despite its problems, the Church is an institution which has a great future, because it has received great promises from God. God has promised us that “the Lord will stretch forth Your strong sceptre from Zion, saying ‘rule in the midst of Your enemies’ ” (Ps.110:2), and that “the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Mat.16:18). Furthermore, the Church will be “the joy of the whole earth” (Ps.48:2), and God is going to use the Church to display His great wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Eph.3:10).

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Before we try to reverse the decline of the church, we’d best remember Who it belongs to, and Who died for it. The church is not mine or yours, but His. So, He has the right to determine what stays, and what goes. Jesus did warn us that He would be sending in angels, who would “...gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire...” (Mat.13:41, 42).

¹¹ Rousas Rushdoony, “The Gospel of John,” 2000, p.23.