

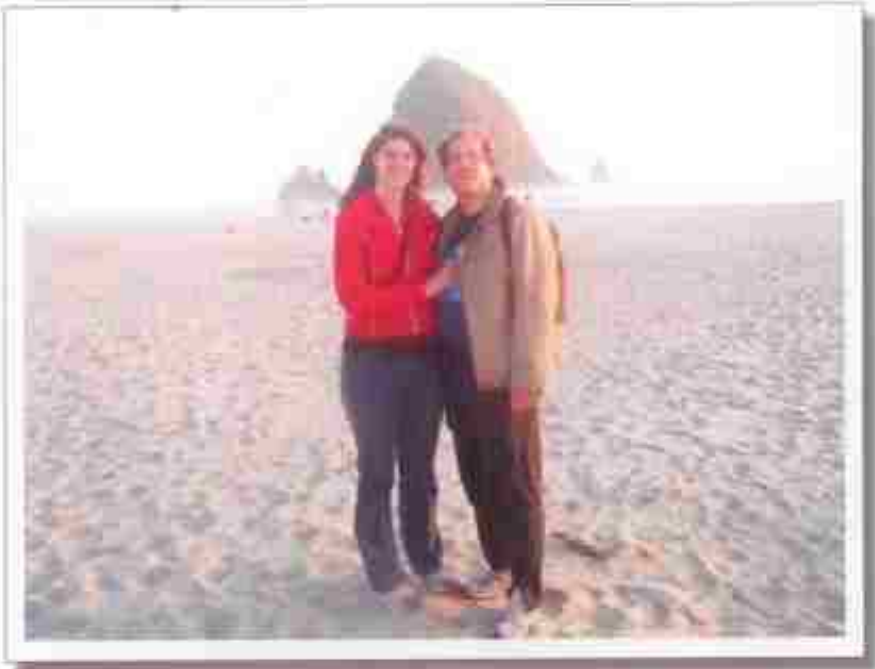
THE PENTECOST

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THE PENTECOST

Repentance is a word used throughout the Bible. What does it mean and is it essential to conversion? We will explore these questions in this March, 2011, issue of The Pentecost as well as discuss Christian involvement in politics. We will also share our (Zion Christian Ministry) vision of Canada. God bless you.



Shawn Stevens

Living a life of faith, serving Jesus Christ, means that we allow Him into every area of our lives, not just certain religious activities. Keeping that in mind, let's look deeper at how that applies to our society today.

Ramona Stevens

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REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

*Let the wicked forsake his way
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return to the Lord,
And He will have compassion on him,
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.*

Isaiah 55:7

Repentance is a decision to turn, with the help of God, from a life of sin to a life of obedience toward God. The Scriptures are filled with the call to repentance.

Remember the account in the New Testament where the disciple, Peter, spoke to a crowd and his convicting word had cut to their hearts. The crowd had responded; "... , 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). Peter's answer was; "... , 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38). When Jesus sent out His disciples, they went with this message; "They went out and preached that men should repent." (Mark 6:12).

Dear reader, I plead with you to take to heart these sobering words spoken by Matthew Henry; "Abuse not therefore the patience and long-suffering of God, by abandoning yourselves to a course of ungodliness; presume not to go on boldly in the way of sinners, nor to sit down securely in an unconverted impenitent state." 1

Scripture records an occasion where some men came to Jesus, telling Him of an unfortunate incident where some Galileans were put to death and their blood mingled with sacrifices. Their assumption seemed to be that these men must have been especially sinful in order to have suffered this fate. Jesus, however, said:

... ' And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that

those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'

Luke 13:2-5

While it is true that God judges unforgiven sin (unforgiven by God), the Bible also records that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). Some think that the Lord is slow in returning but, instead, He is patient with us, holding open the door to repentant sinners. Not slackness, but mercy, is the reason for God's delay. Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, and others, said:

I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Luke 15:7-10

Dear reader, the pathway of sin is ever descending into darkness, misery, heartache, pain, emptiness and disappointment. But there is a higher pathway that Jesus has opened to you and me and He calls us to choose it. Repent. Forsake your sinful ways and run to Him. God longs for us to repent. He says in His Word:

Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'

Ezekiel 33:11

Here, God calls out to sinners to turn from their evil ways. He would far rather forgive men than judge men. However, He does judge men who refuse to turn to Him. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23:37).

The Gospel, or good news, of Christ is a call to repentance and faith. It calls men and women to discipleship. The Gospel sets men free, but it also calls men to careful obedience. It brings times of refreshing to those who turn to God and His ways. It also brings rebuke to hypocrites. One writer has said of the Gospel that, "It was in every sense good news, yet it was anything but easy-believism." 2 God is a God of grace and mercy. However, His grace is not some loose attribute by which He accepts hardened, unconverted sinners who refuse to come to salvation through repentance and faith.

Some have misunderstood grace because in the Book of James faith and works are contrasted. However, just because they can be contrasted in certain ways does not mean that they are in contradiction to each other, or that they are mutually exclusive. Faith is in no way in opposition to yieldedness to God, or to repentance. Instead, faith calls for yieldedness to God and repentance. We are saved by faith, but we are saved by a living faith, not a dead faith. Saving faith that is devoid of repentance is not alive; it is dead. It is imaginary, and it is powerless to change a person's heart.

Repentance is so critically important a component of the Gospel, that to preach a Gospel of salvation that does not require repentance is to not preach the Christian Gospel, at all. Repentance is a forsaking of our old life and ways and, instead, choosing to follow the new and higher way of Christ. The new way of Christ involves carrying a cross. I am not talking about a literal cross or a pendent on a necklace. I am talking about painful opposition and scorn towards you for your making a decision to

follow God. That opposition may come from people, or even from demons, but know that it will be there if you choose Christ's way. Following the way of Christ cost the apostle, Paul, imprisonment, and even death, but he testified of his obedience when he said: "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." (Acts 26: 19-20).

The Bible teaches that God shows compassion and forgiveness to those who will repent. We read:

*Seek the Lord while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near
Let the wicked forsake his way
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return to the Lord,
And He will have compassion on him,
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.
Isaiah 55: 6-7*

To repent is an aspect of submitting to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Those who repent, accept Jesus' lordship. Contrary to some teaching in the Church world today, we do not make Jesus Lord, Jesus is already Lord. We do not make Him Lord, we simply commit ourselves to following Him and accept His lordship, or we rebel against it. "Making Jesus Lord" is a phrase used differently by different people. Some use this phrase in the context of conversion. However, some use this phrase to speak of committing to Christ at a later, or advanced, stage of Christian experience. This second use of the phrase is more seriously wrong. Jesus Christ is Lord and we must accept Him, as such, and submit to Him, as such, at the point of Christian conversion. To not accept Him as Lord is to not accept Him at all.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is both Savior and Lord. A. W. Tozer said that "You cannot believe on a half-Christ." 3 Trying to believe on Jesus, as Savior, yet not accepting

Him, as Lord, is like trying to believe in half a Jesus.

Many have invited Jesus into their heart without emptying their heart for Him to have room to come in. Emptying our heart simply means repenting and surrendering all of ourselves up to God. When this is done, there is room for Jesus to actually come in.

The biblical call to repentance and faith is not a suggestion on how to find a more fulfilling life. It is a command to surrender to God and change our ways. God wants to reconcile unsaved men and women to Himself and to do this involves repentance on our part. Repentant seekers of salvation are to come to the cross of Christ to surrender all, unconditionally.

Repentance is essential to salvation because you can't walk the broad road and walk the narrow road at the same time. One road leads to eternal death and the other leads to eternal life. These roads are going in opposite directions. To choose one is to reject the other. Repentance and faith puts us on the narrow road to heaven.

The reason we must repent is because we are sinful. Humans have a nature which is bent with a strong tendency towards wickedness. When we yield to this inclination, we begin to act out wickedness. This is personal sin. Conversion involves turning from sin and committing to following God. Wickedness and sin are not peripheral issues to God. Conviction confronts the issue and repentance brings a turning to God.

Is repentance something for only the unsaved person to do? No, Christians also make wrong choices which grieve the Lord. When a Christian sins, he is also called to repent. Christians have this precious promise, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). When a Christian repents from sin, he or she is lining their life up with what they have already committed to the Lord, that is, to follow His way. When a non-believer repents before God of sins and self-rule, it is unto conversion. Although both the believer and non-believer repent, this article is dealing primarily with the non-believer repenting unto conversion.

Friend, remember, God would rather forgive us than judge us, but He calls for men and women to repent. Remember, He says; "... 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezekiel 33:11).

With God's forgiveness, we have a clean slate; without God's forgiveness, our slate, our record, our life, is unclean. Yes, without God's forgiveness, we are wicked. There is only one alternative, to repent. Repentance is a decision. Faith is a decision. Prayer is a decision. Pray to the Lord and express your repentance to Him. Ask for His forgiveness. Turn to Him now and give Him your life. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible*, Vol. 6 (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers), 1055.

2. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 27. Taken from *The Gospel According To Jesus* by John F. MacArthur, Jr. Copyright © 1994 by John F. MacArthur, Jr. Use by permission of Zondervan.
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3. A. W. Tozer, quoted in John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 35. Taken from *The Gospel According To Jesus* by John F. MacArthur, Jr. Copyright © 1994 by John F. MacArthur, Jr. Use by permission of Zondervan.
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SHOULD A CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS?

It is a lively debate in Christian culture over whether a believer should participate in government. Those who say "No" usually base their position on their understanding of being separate from the world. I respect their opinion, but I do not share it. We should be separate from the world in the sense that our values should be different from those who do not follow God. If our values are different, then we will also live differently. However, we do have one thing in common with Canadians who are outside of our faith. We are all Canadians. Being a Canadian, in itself, does not obligate us toward political activity, but being Canadian does make us subject to the Canadian government who rules over us federally and provincially.

The Canadian government does debate issues and does make laws which relate to the free practice of our faith. As citizens of Canada, we do have constitutional rights to express our viewpoint to Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs), Members of Parliament (MPs), and other political representatives, on issues that matter deeply to us. In times of elections, we have the right to elect or dismiss governments in a collective way with other Canadians. These are fundamental rights within a democracy. Why should we not use our rights and freedoms to be a part of the decision-making process of where Canada is heading as a nation?

Reader, you might be saying that you are just one man or one woman. That is true but, yourself, together with myself and other believers, are a body. Never underestimate the influence that we can have on government, if we are united in our cause.

In Canada, there is tremendous political apathy and non-participation. Because of this, special interest groups often end up influencing the decisions which governments make. Although they are small in number, they are organized and have a persistence in their political efforts which most Canadians do not.

Canada does not have to sink deeper and deeper into godlessness. Canada can be shaped and changed in ways that allow for the free practice and expression of Christian faith. These changes, however, require Christians to stand up and speak out and let our voice be heard by those we elect or live under the governance of. A people which are apathetic intentionally, and uninvolved in the political process and voting, do not encourage a government to be accountable to its people. Voting, and challenging, and participating in government, is what makes government accountable to its people.

As Christians, we must choose whether we want to be a part of the apathy or a part of the answer. We are called to be salt and light in this world. Just as salt preserves meat and other food products, so, too, do Christian values have a preserving effect on any nation which implements and follows them. Canada needs to be salted again. May we rise up and give voice to our convictions in a day which so desperately needs them.

Shawn Stevens

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OUR VISION OF CANADA

Canada is recognized world-wide as a beautiful, prosperous and diverse nation. It is appreciated by its people for its high standard of living and for its heritage. However, Canada is about more than beavers and maple loafs; it is a country with a purpose and a destiny.

At Zion Christian Ministry, we have a vision for our country of Canada as well as for other nations. In saying that we have a vision for Canada, we are saying that Canada is not presently all that it should be. Canada has difficult, deep and painful problems at its core, but Canada also has potential for change.

Our vision for Canada begins with what Canada's attitude to Christian faith should be. We believe in, and call for, a Canada which upholds the following statement, taken from the Canada Act of 1982, which says: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law". We do not believe that the political state of Canada can create morality and spirituality in men and women, but we do believe it should never interfere with the spiritual work of God, Who is active in creating spiritual experience in men and women and in raising morality in Canada. Moreover, the state should, not only, not interfere with this work; it should protect this work from forces which would seek to undermine it.

Recognizing the supremacy of God also means the preserving of godly ethics and morals. How does a government, like that of Canada, preserve godly morals? What are its boundaries in a sensitive and challenging topic such as this?

Canada is a democracy. Democracy is based on the concept of freedom, that is, the freedom of citizens in the involvement and the shaping of their nation. Democracy is desirable because it generally allows for the peaceful settlement of issues. It creates a basic accountability between government and citizens and creates a non-violent way of removing administrations which do not represent the views of the citizens. Democracy, in itself, does not guarantee that truth will prevail, but it does allow for space and flexibility for correcting error, which many other political systems do not. Democracy allows for difference

of opinion and open discussion, and open discussion is an important factor in arriving at constructive national policy. Democracy, when it is truly followed, puts government and power in the hands of the people.

While democracy puts government and power in the hands of the people, this power should have checks and balances to it. This is because the majority is not always right. In Nazi Germany, a Nazi government rose to power with the overwhelming support of its people. That government perpetrated evil and suffering on millions of people. How did they perpetrate evil? They did so by violating human rights. "Human rights" is the point at which checks and balances to power must come in. What is the political vehicle for protecting human rights from being violated by either the government or the people? It is a charter of rights.

Our vision for Canada is one in which the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is amended to protect basic human rights, such as:

Freedom of Religion

-The right for Churches and individuals to follow God and the Bible without interference. This includes freedom of worship and freedom for prosletizing.

Freedom of Speech

-The right for individuals or groups to speak sincere convictions openly, without the danger of prosecution, and to not have the use of mediums of communication such as media, and others, denied them for their views.

Freedom to Own Property

-The right to own land and belongings, either purchased, given or inherited.

Freedom to vote politically

-The right to democratic elections, both federal, provincial and local.
-The right of citizen's political equality.

Freedom of Choice in Education

-The right of citizens to choose, either, public or private education for their children and not have governments censor Christian values expressed in either.

Freedom to Life

-The honoring and protection of human life at all of its stages, from conception to childhood, to youth, to adulthood.

Freedom of Traditional Family

- The honoring and protecting of the traditional family, including the definition of marriage as the marriage union between one man and one woman, in wedlock.

Protection under Law

- A legal system which protects the rights of citizens and which is enforced by police.

Our vision of Canada is one in which the rights of Canadians are protected by a legal system which restrains and punishes abuse and corruption. The Canadian legal system must foster peace and protect the good of its citizens. It must also respect the Christian Church in Canada and not exclude it from a place of influence in Canadian affairs. It must recognize that many social issues of concern for the Christian Church are also religious issues. The Church's issues are religious and social and are directly connected to human rights. The Canadian legal system must be binding on all citizens, whether common or governmental, and must also have provisions for ruling and prosecuting the actions of aliens.

Much is said about the separation of Church and State. The Church and the State are already separate institutions, but this does not mean that the State has no responsibility towards the Church. The State is called to co-operate with the Church and to in no way restrict its constructive, godly expansion and constructive influence.

What can this be compared to? Within Canadian

government is a combination of governing bodies and this necessitates a "separation of powers" between those powers. The Christian Church is separate from the federal government in the sense that it is not the federal government. However, it has rights, influence and powers which must be respected, honored and defended by the federal government and these must not be violated.

Our vision of Canada is one in which these basic human rights are honored and protected.

These are basic principles which, if followed, will allow for and encourage a healthy and stable nation. These principles and this vision is one that will serve as a positive example to other established and developing nations. A democracy, with these protections on power, will keep administrations accountable to the common Canadian and will give Canadians a nation that they can freely develop and shape.

If the freedoms of religion, speech, ownership of property, right to vote, right to protection of the law, educational choice, life and family, are protected by The Canadian Constitution, then we may have a Canada which is honorable for its integrity and high standards and, most importantly, honors the supremacy of God.

Shawn Stevens

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