

# THE PENTECOST

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# THE PENTECOST



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Welcome to another year of Pentecost articles. This September, 2012, issue will deal with the story of the great downgrade controversy. We will be covering this topic, over three issues, and will attempt to draw from it lessons that we can apply today. Charles Hagen Spurgeon fought for doctrinal truth in his day, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. May we be inspired to do so in our century of the Church. Society is something that men and women make and shape every day. What is it that makes a society strong? We will discuss this as well as look at a strong work ethic and what value it has to society. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

Is truth foundational? Or does it change and take shape according to culture and society's needs? Keep these questions in mind, as you read. God bless you.

Ramona Stevens

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## THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSY AND FAITH FOR THE UPGRADE – PART 1

*The party everywhere apparent has a faith fashioned for the present century - perhaps we ought rather to say, for the present month. The sixteenth century gospel it derides, and that indeed, of every period except the present most enlightened era. It will have no creed because it can have none: it is continually on the move; it is not what it is to-day. It's shout for 'liberty,' its delight is invention, its element is change. On the other hand, there still survive, amid the blaze of nineteenth century light, a few whom these superior persons call 'fossils': that is to say, there are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who consider that the true gospel is no new gospel but is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. These do not believe in 'advanced views,' but judge that the view of truth which saved a soul in the second century will save a soul now, and that a form of teaching which was unknown till the last few years is of very dubious value, and is, in all probability, 'another gospel which is not another.'*<sup>11</sup>

Charles H. Spurgeon

In the nineteenth century, modernism and theological liberalism gained wide acceptance in England. Many ministers began to view fundamentalism as being narrow, irrelevant and unaccommodating. Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon reacted against this, calling it a downward trend, and warned his fellow Englishmen of the gravity of an apostasy of this kind.

The pervasive influence of modernism upon nineteenth-century thought can hardly be understated. It was an era of intellectualism and rationalism. The spirit of criticism expressed itself in education and in common life. Theological dogmas were scrutinized and discarded in the name of logic and reason. Inquiry into science was applauded. Re-evaluation of social and religious values was thought to be an essential task in achieving the goal of greater individualism and humanism.<sup>23</sup> Books, such as

“Principles of Geology,” “Antiquity of Man,” and Charles Darwin's “Origin of Species,” were introducing and popularizing new ideas that proposed to explain the history of the natural world and the origins of life in ways that boldly challenged the claims of the Bible.<sup>45</sup>

The influence of modernism on nineteenth-century thought carried over into theological circles and gave rise to liberal theology in England. Modernism's attack on belief in the transcendent and supernatural cultivated the perfect atmosphere for modern biblical criticism to flourish. Emphasis was placed on reason and “everything had to be intellectualized and voided of its mystery.”<sup>6</sup> This new age demanded theological fluidity<sup>7</sup> and a spirituality that was not confined within rigid lines<sup>8</sup> Liberal theology argued that theological positions must incorporate modern enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> It embraced the modernist concept of humanism, claiming that God's highest self-expression was found in a human man, Christ.<sup>10</sup> It felt that this kind of fluidity would bring a freshness to the study of the Bible and also might help win back the modernist, educated community which was unsympathetic towards evangelicalism.<sup>11</sup>

One doctrinal tenet that liberal theology challenged and redefined was the inspiration of the Bible. The former position, that the Bible was the inspired and inerrant word of God, was first challenged by a compromised position which claimed that various biblical books had varying degrees of divine inspiration. This implied that Scripture was not necessarily true in all of its claims.<sup>12</sup>

Not only did liberal theology challenge and redefine the inspiration of the Bible, it also promoted a new form of interpreting the Bible. It argued that spiritual truths were conveyed allegorically and poetically and that this should be the governing rule used when interpreting the Bible. Such a governing rule dismissed a literal interpretation of such things as the creation narrative and miracles.<sup>13</sup>

As well as challenging miracles, theological liberalism challenged the doctrine of the atonement. The evangelical position that the death of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice on man's behalf, which appeased the wrath of God, became open for debate.<sup>14</sup> The purpose for the death of Christ began to be viewed as simply an example of self-sacrifice for us to follow, rather than a price paid redemptively.<sup>15</sup>

In a short period of time, theological liberalism became widely accepted in nineteenth-century England. Initially, many English theologians were influenced by liberal German theologians. The German professor, J. G. T. Eichoran (1752-1827), seemed to be the first to use the expression, "higher criticism."<sup>16</sup> Alberecht Rirschel (1822-1889) was another liberal German theologian. He rejected the doctrine of original sin<sup>17</sup> and the juristic element in Christ's work.<sup>18</sup> He believed that the modern man wanted, above all other things, to live according to reason and that Christianity could aid and strengthen him in this endeavour. He believed that Christianity was an outlook upon life and morality but not an immediate relationship with God.<sup>19</sup> Some have viewed him as the father of liberal theology.<sup>20</sup>

While German liberal theology was being read in England, English liberal theologians were spreading their teaching, as well. Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) began teaching that the virgin birth was false, that Christ was less than infallible and that the teachings of the Apostle Paul were not given absolute authority. Edward Evanson (1731-1805) denied the apostolic authorship of the Gospel of John.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Belsham (1750-1829) began teaching that the Pentateuch had more than one author and that the creation narratives were in contradiction with scientific knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Possibly the most significant English liberal theologian of this time was D. F. Strauss. He determined to differentiate between the facts of history and what he viewed as mythological expressions of Christian ideas. He proposed to "get behind" the accounts of Christ and find out who Jesus "really was."<sup>23</sup> He determined that "in the person and acts of Jesus no supernaturalism shall be suffered to remain."<sup>24</sup>

The persuasive influence of these liberal theologians, and others, can hardly be understated. Anglican Bishop, J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), stated; "Whether we like it or not we cannot shut higher criticism out. Like frogs in the plague of Egypt, it creeps in everywhere."<sup>25</sup>

While theological liberalism was spreading like frogs in England, not all ministers accepted these changes. Perhaps the most vocal opponent to the new teachings was Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon. He began publishing a warning to all Christians in his periodical, "The Sword and the Trowel." A series of messages became known as "The Down Grade" articles. The first two articles were not actually written by Spurgeon but, rather, by an associate of his, Robert Schindler. Spurgeon continued this series, beginning with the third article. To give a mental picture of what they were trying to say, they began speaking of a high pinnacle. This pinnacle had a great downgrade. Truth and churches occupy a position on the top of the pinnacle. As many churches compromised their beliefs, they gradually became disconnected from the truth. With this disconnection, they lost their footing also, and began tumbling down the great downgrade.

In the third issue, Spurgeon began warning his readers of some specific things. He lamented that preachers were spreading unbelief. He warned that such ministers are ten times more dangerous than atheists.<sup>26</sup> He argued that along with the abandonment of sound doctrine also went the living of a holy life. Spurgeon warned that some ministers were amusing themselves at play houses or theatres. He said that there was a time in England when a Nonconformist minister would lose his whole church for making such a compromise.<sup>27</sup> He lamented that the doctrines of atonement<sup>28</sup> and of the inspiration of the Scriptures were being derided, that the Holy Spirit was being degraded, that punishment for sin and belief in the resurrection was treated as fiction.<sup>29</sup> He reminded his readers that many of them were called by the name of "Nonconformist," and that "Our nonconformity is beyond measure precious as a vital spiritual force, but only while it remains such will it

justify its own existence.”<sup>30</sup> With strong and compelling language, Spurgeon communicated the gravity of the downgrade issue. Liberal theology was not just another side of Christianity, it was apostasy. He declared; “A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese.”<sup>31</sup>

Spurgeon told his readers that the stand that he was taking was simply his duty to take as a minister. He assured them that he did not gain pleasure in stirring up antagonism and that he had not written in hate. His motive for writing was that “the gospel is too precious for us to be indifferent to its adulteration. By the life we bear to the Lord Jesus we are bound to defend the treasure with which He has put us in trust.”<sup>32</sup>

Spurgeon was well aware that liberal theology had spread within his own denomination. He weighed the decision and then made the difficult choice to withdraw his personal membership. It wasn't easy for him, for there were others within the denomination who were loyal to him and who shared his concerns.

Spurgeon opposed the humanistic focus of modern liberalism. He maintained that theology should not be man-centred, nor should it be shaped to accommodate human wisdom. He lamented that, “The new religion practically sets 'thought' above revelation, and, constitutes man the supreme judge of what ought to be true.”<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon's decision to oppose theological liberalism, both by word and by action of disassociation, offended many in nineteenth-century England. The *Down Grade* articles shocked many evangelicals who were going with the flow of modern thought. Spurgeon was urged to soften his rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> Because Spurgeon was suffering from kidney problems during this time, some felt that his writings were just the rantings of a stressed, dying man. Others thought that Spurgeon was being too vague.<sup>35</sup> Some claimed that Spurgeon was crying “wolf,” making an issue unnecessarily. Others responded with a defence of theological liberalism. One newspaper, *The Christian World*, said that young ministers, and others, must now decide whether or not they would accept the

“'modern thought' which in Mr Spurgeon's eyes is a 'deadly cobra',” but in their eyes was “The glory of the century.”<sup>36</sup> This magazine said further that “Mr. Spurgeon professes to despise or ignore the science and criticism at the progressive life and thought of the present day.”<sup>37</sup> John Clifford, the vice-president of the denomination in 1887, said that Spurgeon's statements had not been proved.<sup>38</sup> Spurgeon was subsequently censored in April, 1888.<sup>39</sup>

Was liberal theology the glory of the nineteenth century? Did it bring to England a new and improved form of Christianity that Englishmen of other generations did not know? While it is true that God does express Himself through human form, liberal theology was wrong to centre its teachings on human expression and humanism. Their redefinition of the inspiration of the Bible was too great an alteration to be tolerated. It directly undermined the authority of the Bible, the very grounds of Christianity itself. Although the Bible does convey some of its truths through allegory and poetry, this does not mean that we should view the bulk of Scripture in this way. By making allegorical interpretations the governing rule of hermeneutics, many in Spurgeon's day were able to dismiss the difficult teachings or commands of Scripture. While Christ's sacrifice was an example, it was foremost an atonement. By challenging the doctrine of the atonement, nineteenth-century English theologians were challenging Christianity's most central theme. By simply flowing with the downgrade, many Victorian Englishmen were making a compromise. Spurgeon may have been suffering from kidney problems but the nineteenth-century modernist Church was suffering from *spiritual* sickness that was much more serious. Spurgeon was not being vague. He named his issues: the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement, punishment for sin, the resurrection and holiness. Then he addressed these issues directly, clearly and with great persuasion. This is in contrast to many liberal theologians whose writings were deeply philosophical and often mind-bending in their complexity. It is because Spurgeon approached these issues so directly that he was asked to temper his rhetoric. It was precisely his strong preaching that was needed to

communicate the seriousness of the situation. As Spurgeon said; “A little plain speaking would do the world of good just now.”<sup>40</sup> Because liberalism had spread in nineteenth-century England to the extent that it had, it cannot fairly be said that Spurgeon was crying “wolf.” The old story of the boy who cried “wolf” does not apply because, as Spurgeon has said; “The parallels only fail in the all important point that he cried ‘Wolf’ when there was none, and we are crying ‘Wolf’ when packs of them are howling so loudly that it would be superfluous for us to shout at all if a wretched indifferentism had not brought a deep slumber upon those who ought to guard the flocks.”<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon was not overreacting on his point, for theological liberalism in England was as plenteous as the frogs in Egypt. The liberal theologians of Spurgeons day were more dangerous to the English Church than atheists. Atheists did not have the trust of the English churchmen. Many liberal theologians did have this trust and were undermining the truth of sacred Scripture. Spurgeon was a Nonconformist in the true sense of the word and voiced his concerns out of his duty as a minister. While it is true that nineteenth-century England saw many changes in technology, politics and philosophy, does this necessitate a change in spirituality? Spurgeon's question is a fair one; “Do men really believe that there is a gospel for each century?”<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon's question is a fair one and his stand was a true one; theological liberalism had effectively placed many Churches on the downgrade.

**Shawn Stevens**

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Dec. 1888, *The “Down Grade” Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d), 71.
2. Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1913), 201.
3. Louis A. Drummond comments, “Moreover, as is so often the case, that general humanistic atmosphere soon infiltrated theological circles. It began to manifest itself as an emphasis on human development and far less on a God-centred approach to the realities of life as prevailed for centuries.” Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 661.
4. H. A. Wilson, “The Development of Evangelicalism,” in *Liberal Evangelicalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1970), 19-20.
5. Louis A. Drummond comments; “... Evolutionary theory began to take such a hold on the mindset of many Victorians that resulted in a humanistic approach to all reality.” Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 661.
6. John Dickie, *Fifty Years Of British Theology* (Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb Ltd., 1937), 201.
7. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil : The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative- Liberal Debate in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).
8. Vernon F. Storr, “The Bible and Its Value,” *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 87.
9. H. A. Wilson, “The Development of Evangelicalism,” in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 26-27.
10. E. A. Burroughs, “Evangelicalism and Personality,” in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 52-53.
11. Robert Anderson, *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), 39.
12. *Ibid.*, 178-171.
13. Vernon F. Storr, “The Bible and its Value,” in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 83-85.
14. H. A. Wilson, “The Development Of Evangelicalism,” in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 23-24.
15. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 128.
16. *Ibid.*, 40.
17. *Ibid.*, 82.
18. *Ibid.*, 85.
19. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century : Its Background and History* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 2001), 641, 644.
20. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 74.
21. *Ibid.*, 41.
22. *Ibid.*, 42.
23. D. F. Strauss, Quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince Of Preachers*, 662.
24. D. F. Strauss, “The Life of Jesus,” quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 45-46.
25. J. C. Ryle, quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 51.
26. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 19.
27. *Ibid.*, 18.
28. Because Spurgeon was a Calvinist, it would be easy to misinterpret the issue that he was addressing with regards to the atonement. In the *Down Grade* Articles, he was not directing his objections towards those such as Methodists, who held Arminian understanding of the atonement. He clarifies this point in these words; “In our fellowship with Methodists of all grades we have found them firmly adhering to those great evangelical doctrines for which we contend ... We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system ... Those who hold the eternal verities of salvation, and yet do not see all that we believe and embrace, are by no means the objects of our opposition: our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice, denying the inspiration of Holy Scriptures, and casting slurs upon justification by faith. The present struggle is not a debate upon the question of Calvinism or Arminianism, but of the truth of God versus the inventions of men.” Charles H. Spurgeon, quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 678.
29. Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Sword and the Trowel,” Aug. 1887, *The “Down Grade” Controversy*, 17.
30. *Ibid.*, 19.

31. Ibid., 17.

32. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Sept. 1887, *The "Down Grade" Controversy*, 23.

33. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Choice Teachings for the Chosen," in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 187.

34. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel : When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 207.

35. Ibid., 208.

36. "The Christian World," quoted in Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, *The "Down Grade" Controversy*, 30.

37. W. Copeland Bowie, "The Christian World," Sept. 22, 1887 in *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 184.

38. Ernst W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 133.

39. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, Cd., *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography. 2 Vols* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 470.

40. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, *The "Down Grade" Controversy*, 20.

41. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel" Oct. 1887, *The "Down Grade" Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 28.

42. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Apr. 1888, *The "Down Grade" Controversy*, 50.

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## A STRONG SOCIETY

What is meant by the word "society"? A definition sometimes can elude us. Why is that? It is because there are many different elements to society and it is challenging to encapsulate them all into one concise definition. Society is a classification of the largest grouping of people who live in close proximity to each other and who share a common culture. What causes societies to form and flourish? Common language, customs, etc, all play some part but the one element which is essential to the development and sustaining of a society is truth. Societies can be torn apart by division and lies or they can be established and held together by truth.

Truth is very closely related to values. Values are those criteria which make up your belief system of right and wrong. Values, when they are lived out, direct behaviour. If a person's values are grounded in truth, they will be a stable person. If a society's values are grounded in truth it will be a stable society. Values can, and should, direct more than behaviour; they should also direct other things in our world such as technology. Technology is a powerful force in our world but technology does not always work together with truth. Sometimes technology is used to oppress and harm others. Sometimes technology races on ahead of our values and enables people to behave in ways that they have not really thought through. The implications of their behaviour may not be consistent with their values. Some sociologists call this "culture lag," when a society is trying to adapt the values that it holds to catch up to the advances of technology. However, there is a problem with this kind of thinking and that is because our values should direct how we use technology, not the other way around.

Not all within society want to see their society grow together in strength and in truth. There are many forces that pull societies apart. Secular rock music, for example, has been used by many to promote promiscuity, violence, abuse of women, disrespect for authority, homosexual lifestyle, rape and drug abuse. In some cases, individuals decide how much they are going to let negative

messages such as these influence them. In other cases, they are influenced beyond what they intended to be. Influence of this kind weakens society and pulls people apart.

How can we build a strong society that is held together by truth? One important place to start is with the family. By family, I mean the “nuclear family.” That means the joining of one man and one woman in holy matrimony and any children that they may, or may not, have. Children are offspring either by bloodline or by adoption. Families are the building blocks of society. They are like atoms. Atoms are made of neutrons, protons and electrons and if you take one of those parts away, they are destroyed. There are many forces at work, within society, to destroy the family. These forces might not know that they are destroying the building blocks of society when they try to change the nuclear family into some other form. Some openly attack this institution, claiming that it is repressive and simply a reflection of inequality in society. However, functional family promotes and exercises people in the disciplines of responsibility, cooperation, patience, self-denial and love. Each of these values is needed to build society and make it work. Those who find family repressive may have come from dysfunctional families. In other cases, detractors of families often are rebelling at having their own wills and their own ways suppressed. In many cases they want to be liberated from the very things that hold society together. Some want to live lawless lives that are free of responsibilities towards God and towards others. Such persons will not likely recognize the benefits of family.

Today, single motherhood is exalted but statistics reveal disturbing facts about single motherhood. Of American single mothers, 6.5% are widows, 37.8% are divorced and 41.3% gave birth out of wedlock. This suggests that many American single mothers chose a lifestyle that led to single motherhood. The media has glorified single motherhood as a triumph of feminism. However, single motherhood is destroying families and is creating a dysfunctional environment for children. American statistics show that by 1996, 70% of inmates in state juvenile detention centers were raised by single

mothers.<sup>1</sup> *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* claims that children from single-parent families have made up 63% of youth suicides, 70% of teen pregnancies, 71% of adolescent chemical/substance abuse, 90% of homeless and runaway children and 80% of prison inmates.<sup>3</sup> The *Village Voice* reports that children raised in single mother homes,

*'are five times more likely to commit suicide, nine times more likely to drop out of high school, 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances, 14 times more likely to commit rape (for boys), 20 times more likely to end up in prison, and 32 times more likely to run away from home.'*<sup>4</sup>

Sociologists Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur claim; “In our opinion, the evidence is quite clear: Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or educational background.”<sup>5</sup> As well as creating a dysfunctional environment, single motherhood is creating a financial underclass. In America, 50% of single mothers are below the poverty line and their children statistically are six times more likely to be in poverty than children from homes with married parents.<sup>5,5</sup> Despite these horrible consequences, many women are pursuing motherhood outside of marriage as a way of achieving personal independence. Tremendous efforts have been made to remove the stigma of illegitimacy and Hollywood glamorizes single motherhood in many movies.

One of the benefits of family is protection for each member of the family. In a functional family, each member of the family has their reputation, freedom, value and dignity protected by other members of the family who support them. The bond of marriage is a bond of commitment which a husband and wife make, ideally securing for the other, a safe place for the growth of love and intimacy and for sexual union. This is the only institution where sexual experience is blessed and sexual



fulfilment can be reached. Ideally the family also is provided for financially by a father or mother until other members are old enough to provide for themselves. Functional families work together to strengthen its members, spiritually, emotionally, socially, educationally and financially. It is sad when someone is, in some way, separated from this support system. Strong, functional families build society and cause it to flourish and move forward.

Families are important building blocks of society but they are not the only building blocks. Institutions also play an important role. Examples of constructive institutions in society would be good Churches, good educational organizations, good charities, food banks and more. These institutions serve society by spreading truth, the main ingredient to building strong values, and by providing services for others. There are many faith-based institutions which provide helpful, and even essential, services to the public. In many ways, their services become a safety net for others in ways that government agencies could not. It is beneficial for societies and governments to aid institutions such as these for the betterment of society.

While institutions are an important part of society, a strong and varied educational system also is a component of a strong society. Education exists on different levels. When people talk of the educational system they usually mean the primary, secondary, post-secondary and post-graduate systems. These institutions exist to provide education and should be about the business of spreading truth. Sadly, in many instances, such institutions have drifted from truth and have taken on other goals such as transmitting culture, socialization and the redefining of history, science and values. A liberal political perspective has saturated the educational system and special interest groups have been successful in hijacking many academic studies and using them to spread propaganda. Reacting to this, many parents and adult students have chosen private-school education. This option removes the student from much harmful influence and provides him with an environment to learn in, which is positive and inspiring.

In many cases it has been demonstrated that private schools (there will always be exceptions to this general rule), outperform public schools. The public school system in America and Canada is faltering. In international comparisons, American students excel in the fourth grade in reading, math and science, exceeding 26 of 35 countries in reading literacy. However, as American children advance in years, their performance drops. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they achieve average results. By the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they are near the bottom of the scale.<sup>6</sup> Canadian statistics also show a need for concern.

The *Fraser Institute* is “a non-partisan research and educational organization based in Canada.” One service that they provide is a report-card system which evaluates the quality of elementary and secondary schools across Canada, both public and private. What does their research show? They rate schools on a one-to-ten scale, one being poor and ten being exceptional. In Ontario, 18 Catholic schools and 22 public schools, out of 2,327 schools, reached, and maintained, a five-year rating of 9, or higher, at the elementary level. However, at the secondary level, Catholic schools, for which there was five years of data, rated 6.5 and public schools, for which there was five years of data, scored 6.1. In Alberta, out of 540 schools, for which there was five years of data, 3 public, 1 private and 1 charter school gained a score of 9, or higher, at the elementary level. However, at the secondary level, out of 239 schools, for which there was five years of data, 4 private and only 1 public school achieved a score of 9, or higher, over a five-year average. In British Columbia, over a five-year rating, independent schools scored 8.4 at the elementary level and public schools scored only 5.9. Twenty-nine independent schools and only 5 public schools scored 9, or higher, over five years. At the secondary level, for British Columbia and the Yukon, independent schools scored 8.3 and only 5.9 for public schools. Twelve private schools scored 9, or higher, over five years with no public school in this province or territory achieving this goal.<sup>7</sup>

Students generally do better in private schools than in public schools. Why is this? One reason is that in private

schools class sizes are smaller and there is more one-on-one time between the teachers and students. Another reason is that private schools generally don't try to supplant the student's belief system and value system with that of liberal, secular culture. In the public school system, Christian students are bombarded with postmodern, liberal, feminist, pluralistic, pro-gay and secular teaching which directly challenges their faith. This creates great tension within them and these conditions of conflict and tension make the school system a difficult place in which to learn. In private schools, students have an environment where wholesome values have a better chance of not being attacked and, thus, there is peace in which to pursue education and to excel. Private schools provide a much-needed service for students and they should be funded by governments. Governments should support choice and competition. Christian schooling and home schooling provide parents and students with choices, the highest choices possible. They also provide competition. The public school must be challenged by a system better than its own if it is to improve. It takes pressure, and competition does provide some pressure for public schools to reform. Let the government give equal support to both systems. This will hold both systems accountable and keep them striving for excellence. We need a revolution in the public school education system. We need to flush out all of the postmodern, liberal propaganda from our system. This is not only needed for primary and secondary schools but also for post-secondary schools. It is not as hard as one might think for governments that have the political will to do this; the key is to cut funding to programs which are ideological, instead of educational. Government should continue to fund trade schools but university programs which are ideological and propaganda-saturated should have their funding cut until they reform. If this is followed, it shouldn't take long for universities to produce the kind of results which government, society and truth is calling for.

Another aspect of a strong society is the participation of citizens in politics. At the most fundamental level this is a call for citizens to vote. In Canada, it is shameful that massive apathy is expressed at election time. Large sections of the population do not vote.

Much of the public does not know what each political party stands for. This is a concern because most of the population has fairly moderate views on issues. However, if moderates don't vote, radicals certainly will and when radical elements become significant parts of a party's support network, the parties themselves become more radical in the positions that they hold. Special-interest groups begin influencing and directing the course that nations take. Citizens may feel that they are snubbing the government by not voting but, really, they are the ones losing in the end. The government is making many decisions affecting the lives of citizens and many citizens are simply letting them make these choices. By not voting, many citizens are saying that they don't care what direction their country is headed in and they don't care if politicians make all of the decisions. On the positive side, when citizens do inform themselves of what political parties stand for, and do vote, they hold their governments accountable for the choices that are made. They also are showing that they appreciate living in a democracy. There are many people around the world in non-democratic nations who are protesting and suffering imprisonment and mistreatment for their public stand and public dream of gaining democratic freedom. Many have died trying to gain this freedom. Sadly, many who have this freedom, not by struggle but by birth, do not appreciate or even use it. Participating in politics goes beyond voting; it also may include writing to elected officials and expressing your views on social issues. It may include volunteering at a campaign office or even running for office. Societies that have high participation in politics have the potential of becoming stronger than ones that do not.

Health-care is another major issue in society. It is such a big issue because every society has huge health needs and health-care remains one of the most expensive things that people require. Some nations subsidize, heavily or completely, health-care. Such sponsorship is a huge blessing and it is very good when governments make health-care a priority. When governments pour money into health systems it directly benefits people. People want their tax dollars to go towards their own health needs. This is a cause worth speaking out on. The *Canadian Health Act* was created to provide for Canadians according to their

needs, not according to their ability to pay. It was designed with principles such as, public administration (carried out by public institutions, not on a profit basis), comprehensiveness (all services deemed medically necessary are insured), portability (it must still be in effect when a citizen moves out of province), universality (it must be for all Canadians) and accessibility (it must be provided in such a way that Canadians have reasonable access to it).

While health-care is important, another important aspect of society is the economy. An economy thrives when hard-working people, within it, are given the opportunity to work and become upwardly mobile. This is a part of having a good work ethic. Government can encourage a strong work ethic by doing several things. Firstly, it can lower taxes on income, on businesses and in general. When industrious citizens become too heavily taxed they lose the ability to become upwardly mobile. This kills the spirit of the work ethic in people. Lowering taxes means governments don't have as much money for supporting social programs and agencies. Governments have less money to hand out. There are many within society who simply want government to provide support for them. Lowering taxes will mean providing less hand-outs but it will strengthen the economy and reward those who are willing to propel society forward. There will always be those in society who have barriers to working productively. Should they be compensated? Governments should give help to those who genuinely can't provide for themselves. However, governments ought to be careful that they don't offer too many social programs because of the cost and because, when this happens, government becomes too involved in the lives of people. When this happens, the possibility of exploiting that power becomes very real. Governments must not become too large. However, there are many who have barriers to being in the workforce and need support. What is needed, in many cases, is not support to stay unemployed but support in overcoming those barriers to employment so that they are able to work. I believe that the elderly and the physically handicapped in society should not have to work and should receive financial help.

Along with the economy, another important component of society is the legal system. Legal systems should exist for several reasons, such as: for retribution, that is, providing punishment for crime and justice for the innocent; for deterrence, that is, to show would-be criminals that crime doesn't pay; and for social protection, to keep a wall of separation between society and those who would harm society and individuals. Lastly, the criminal system should also have some form of rehabilitation in it. Rehabilitation doesn't mean that criminals should be released at some future time, necessarily. Legal systems should be made in such a way that they can be reformed, when they are abused, and citizens should have input to these reforms. Sadly, many times courts become controlled by special-interest groups and justice is replaced by judicial activism. Judges should not be given positions but, instead, should be elected to their position by the people and should face re-election, or expulsion, every few years. People should also have the option of appealing the verdicts. The court system is too expensive in most countries and governments should look at finding ways of making it more affordable.

One important issue that any society's legal system should address is that of violence against women. Outcry over this kind of violence became more and more outspoken in the 1980s and became an object of serious discussion for the United Nations in 1985. Today, much attention has been given to this horrible reality which plagues societies. Violence against women can take the form of household violence, wife beating and rape, or state-issued persecution. It has been estimated that between 60 to 100 million women world-wide are missing as a result of violence. Many of these are sold into the sex trade. Others are victims of gender-selective infanticide and for other reasons. Governments and institutions can help with the problem by opening homes for battered women and by providing funding and support for the abused. As well, governments can create strict laws protecting women. Governments should also put pressure on other nations that have proven to be the most abusive and have ignored human rights.

While protection for women is important, another important component of society is respect for human life. Life is precious, important beyond words and sacred. This includes the lives of the elderly and the unborn. In many societies unborn human life is the most unprotected form of humanity. This must change if a society is to be civilized and moral in any sense of the word. Abortionists claim that it is an issue of the right women have to their own bodies, to be able to have fetuses aborted. However, people's rights must never extend to the point where they are granted to take the lives of innocent children. Sadly, this is the case in most western nations. Abortionists say that a fetus is not really a person because it has not entered the moral community of a society. Pro-life advocates maintain that a fetus is a person because a fetus is genetically human. Killing unborn human life is killing someone who is like us, only younger. Though younger than us, they are still human. There are many crimes in society. However, the killing of innocent children must be considered one of the worst. When a society allows this, its legal system becomes a mockery. If society doesn't protect the lives of unborn children then any other law concerning lesser offences is hypocritical. It is enormously important that societies protect the lives of unborn children.

While respect for human life is important in society, another feature within society which must be in place is freedom of speech. Healthy public debate is important in exploring issues deeply. Debates present two positions, and their merits and faults are held out to be discussed and evaluated. Freedom of speech means that a society, or ruling party, is willing to listen to different views. Freedom of speech also means the freedom to publish written materials and this right should not be taken away by governments. Sadly, in our world freedom of speech is often denied. Powerful special-interest groups have clout and influence governments and legal systems to control the flow of ideas and information. Institutions and the media exert a lot of power over what citizens are allowed to talk about. If something is not inclusive to all, or offensive to some, it is often squashed. This is because it is said that the material is likely to offend others. However, any position of conviction is bound to offend some people. Forbidding freedom of speech does not stop offence; it

only chooses who you are going to offend and who you are going to favour. Other times, governments limit freedom of speech. This kind of oppression has led to much unrest. Many dictatorships, or communist ruling elites, believe that speech belongs to elites and they want government-regulated, government-approved, government-monitored and government-licenced controls. Citizens must have free speech, free voice and freedom of inquiry. There are so many examples of the squelching of free speech in the so-called free world. Pro-family radio ministries such as *Focus on the Family*, if they speak out against the homosexual lifestyle, something that the Bible condemns (see Leviticus 18:22), run the risk of facing sanctions from the *Canadian Communications Commission*.

Government is the last aspect of society that we will discuss here. Obviously, political leadership is extremely important to a society. Do governments rule, or serve, the societies they are apart of? The answer is, "Both." Yes, governments rule societies but governments also have a responsibility to serve their citizens. They serve by maintaining freedom, order and security and by constraining physical violence. They should also encourage productivity. They are to restrain evil, promote justice and reward good. Good government must protect its citizens by modelling mercy and justice. Governments should provide essential services. Elected officials should be honest and see their position as one of trust. Governments must exercise financial restraint and integrity. Governments should strive for peace and should listen to those who disagree with them. They should be promoting freedom in society. Good government needs to know that it is accountable to God. The Bible says; "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:16-17). The "him," in these verses, refers to Jesus Christ. Governments were made by Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ.

Governments should also have a healthy relationship with the Christian Church. The state legitimately has only as much power and right to rule over the lives of people as God has bestowed upon it. The state has no authority to interfere with the kingdom of God. God's kingdom is spiritual and secular governments are not competent to direct it. Governmental authority must never infringe on the rights and liberties of the Christian Church to worship and follow God and to educate her children in godliness. Churches and governments, both, have service roles and each should recognize this and respect the rights of the other, to serve their society. Many, today, cry out every time the Church becomes vocal on social or political issues, that we must have separation between Church and the state. The Church and the state are already separate, that much is sure, but this does not mean that the Church and the state have no relationship with each other. The government should have great respect for the Church. It should not interfere with her fulfilling her mandate and commission. It should even support her in many of her efforts to serve others. Many of the Church's goals for the betterment of mankind overlap the governments own humanitarian goals. It is in areas such as this that government should support the Church. Governments should protect the Church from legal systems and other organizations which are hostile toward it. Government has a great responsibility to honour the Church and involve the Church in the leadership of society. The Church also has a relationship with the government. It should pray for government. It is to raise and promote morals and values which model good citizenship and honesty. It can also fill the gaps, where they exist, for service in the community. The Church can serve the community by ministering to its spiritual needs and temporal needs. We should be giving advice that is useful to governments. We are to pay tax and be thankful for governments. This does not mean that there is never a time for civil disobedience; when governments command us to disobey the Lord, our response should be like the apostles: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Rulers are fallible, yet they still exist as agents of God's order and operate to benefit and serve humanity. God uses nonchristian as well as Christian, rulers and governments.

For example, He used Assyria (see Isaiah 10:5). Cyrus, a Persian king, was used by God (see Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1). Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant (see Jeremiah 27). Even Jesus said that Pilot had power given him from above (see John 19:10-11). The greatest privilege a society can have is to have living and working within it, the kingdom of God. The Church brings blessing, goodness and truth to society.

We have been looking at the things which cause society to flourish and become strong. We have also looked at elements of society which weaken and unravel it, if not corrected. Society will rise or fall in direct response to the values it holds. If society follows the way of truth, it will truly be moving forward. If society rejects truth, it suffers and eventually self-destructs. Societies are put together with the building blocks of family, good institutions, good education, health-care, good economic decisions, just legal systems, good political involvement and respect for human life and protection for those most vulnerable in society, such as the unborn, elderly and women. Lastly, a strong society maintains freedom of speech. May God guide us and may He be honored by the type of society that we, together, create.

**Shawn Stevens**

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- 1 Wade Horn, "Why There Is No Substitute for Parents," *Imprints* 26, No. 6 (June 1997), 2.
- 3 Bob Ray Sanders, "Hey, Y'all, Let's Fill the Hall, (of Fame)," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 28, 2007; Mona Charen, "More Good News Than Bad?" *Washington Times*, March 16, 2001 (citing Bill Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: American Society at the End of the Twentieth Century* [New York: Broadway Books, 1994]).
- 4 Chuck Eddy, "The Daddy Shady Show," *Village Voice*, December 31, 2002.
- 5 Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, quoted in Jason DeParle, "Raising Kevin," *New York Times*, August 22, 2004.
- 5.5 Chuck Colson, *How Shall We Live*, sited in Ann Coulter, *Guilty* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009) 39.
- 6 Ann Coulter, *Godless* (New York: Crown Forum, 2006), 151.
- 7 <http://www.fraserinstitute.org> I believe that these statistics are from 2011.

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## STRONG WORK ETHIC AND PROSPERITY

Are you a producer or a consumer? Any honest person would admit to being both. However, it is possible to be more of a producer than a consumer. It is possible to give more than you take and to leave behind blessings for others. Hard work has always been a key element to productivity and productivity can create prosperity as well as a sense of accomplishment. These are key elements of society and when they are discouraged, society slumps. The all-consumer looks to others to step forward and work and to produce while he or she sits back and consumes. How is productivity encouraged in society and how is it discouraged?

Socialism is a powerful, left-wing, political ideology which seeks to divide wealth equally or to spread resources more widely among the largest number of people possible. It is defined as "the theory or system of the ownership and operation of the means of production and distribution by society or the community rather than by private individuals, with all members of society or the community sharing in the work and the products." <sup>1</sup> One viewpoint is that this is only fair and right and that it creates equality within society. However, despite the advance of socialism, the more human history unfolds, the more we see within socialist society inequality and the abuse of trust. In a socialistic society, who is being trusted to redistribute the resources of a nation? It is the government of that nation. Socialism is simply the state-enforced redistribution of wealth in which government takes from the producers and gives to themselves first and, then, sparingly, to the consumers. This discourages the producers in society and discourages productivity. Discouraged producers often become converted to being mainly consumers, not producers.

On the opposite side of the fence from socialism is capitalism. Capitalism is the belief in the investment of resources into private enterprise. Capitalism is premised on a strong work ethic and on becoming upwardly mobile through hard work and wise investment. Prosperous businesses grow and, as they grow, they hire others,

generating economic growth. As businesses grow, others are given the opportunity to generate wealth through employment in the business. This causes economies to grow and expand. These are positive aspects to capitalism. However, capitalism, if not properly managed, also, in many cases, has led to greed and the hoarding of wealth.

What is a biblical perspective on wealth and the work ethic? It begins with the premise that everything belongs to God. We read; “THE EARTH is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” (Psalm 24:1). We don’t own anything. Is this socialism? No. Governments and consumers don’t really own anything either, that is, in the absolute sense. Everything belongs to God and we are stewards of what we are put in charge of. What does that stewardship involve? It involves supporting God’s kingdom and, also, our families. Families have growing needs and productive families meet those needs through hard work and a strong work ethic. Families that are allowed to generate wealth are in a good position to support themselves and, also, God’s kingdom. Stewardship extends beyond God’s kingdom and our families; it also includes helping the poor. Who are the poor? The Bible speaks of many poor but repeatedly seems to draw special attention to a specific segment of the poor. The Bible repeatedly speaks up for widows (see 1 Timothy 5:3) and orphans (see James 1:27). These are members of society who are especially disadvantaged and need our help. They don’t have the necessary resources to invest in the economy and are struggling with personal sorrow. We are called to help them.

How does society work, and the poor receive help, if God owns everything? God’s unlimited ownership of the whole Earth is understood in conjunction with our limited ownership of possessions. The Ten Commandments are premised on the limited ownership that people have of belongings. The tenth commandment said that “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17 NASB). This command is

against coveting another’s property and establishes the right to ownership of property. Society functions well when people recognize that they are limited owners of their assets and then use their assets to provide for themselves and their families, for God’s kingdom and for the poor.

Who should make the decision on how resources in society are divided up? Socialism says that the government should decide. Socialist governments take away the God-given right to property and destroy the profit motive. Then government, allegedly, gives to the poor. If this is true, then why do socialist and communist countries usually remain among the poorest of countries, at least in terms of resources being distributed to the citizens? The answer lies in the greed and corruption of governments and the lack of incentive to produce on the part of citizens. That lack of incentive exists in large part because the governments and the political system has destroyed that incentive.

In capitalist countries, are there not many poor who would be helped by socialism? No doubt there are, but should all of the poor be given handouts? I have talked above about the widow and the orphan whom Scripture describes as helpless and needy. I believe that seniors (Jesus speaks of the responsibility of children to support their elderly parents. See Matthew 15:4-6) and the handicapped should also be helped by government support. There is another category of poor whom the Bible does not defend and that is the sluggard. The sluggard is an able-bodied man or woman who chooses not to work. (See Proverbs 13:4). The Bible does not defend the sluggard; it rebukes him. Socialism punishes the productive person and rewards the sluggard. The sluggard is the product and the beneficiary of socialism; he is the great consumer of other people’s resources.

What happens when individuals are allowed to divide up their own resources? Potentially, they learn responsibility. Potentially, they spend their resources responsibly, to care for themselves and their families, God’s kingdom and the legitimate poor. Does this always

occur? No, of course not. There are always many people who spend their resources irresponsibly. However, they must answer to God for this failing. It is not the job of government to regulate and redistribute the larger part of the resources of hard-working people. Has having the government take all of a productive person's resources and earnings resulted in the poor being relieved from poverty? No, it hasn't. It has just made governments richer and generally creates a dependent relationship that the poor have with government. Study will show that socialist countries generally have some of the worst and most widespread poverty. When people are given the right to divide their own resources, they are treated with respect; they are given the opportunity to act responsibly and a strong work ethic is encouraged in them.

What about Third World nations? Are they exploited by enterprising, capitalistic nations? To some extent they may be, and this should be exposed when discovered, but what is rarely talked about is how much good that foreign investment does in other lands. Large corporations establish themselves in poorer countries with the permission of governments and begin investing in that country. They create jobs and much of their profit flows into the countries in which they are operating. They bring development to whole regions and educate people, giving them new skills. They build roads, pipelines, train systems and railways, and provide transportation, communication and other services. This propels countries forward and the lives of individuals and families are bettered. Yes, corporations also make profits but it is a win-win situation for companies and host countries in many ways.

Doesn't the Bible warn against riches? The Bible does bring many warnings about riches. The Bible tells us that "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, ..." (1Timothy 6:10 NASB) and greed is rebuked. God knows that riches can steal away a person's heart, that is, if they allow this. I do not think that this means that it is wrong to have wealth. I believe that God wants us to recognize His ownership of all things and, then, to be both productive and generous. He loves to bless people who are faithful to Him. We read; "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and

received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him." (Genesis 26:12-14). Here, we see one example of God's blessing upon a man.

Will we honor God with our lives and be more of a producer than we are a consumer? Will we walk through life giving more than we take? Will we be productive? Will we have a good work ethic? Only we can answer these questions. God owns everything and He has given us limited ownership of property and possessions so that we might support ourselves and our families, His work and the poor. He wants us to help the needy such as widows and orphans. May governments not take away from their citizens the incentive and ability to carry this out.

## Shawn Stevens

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