

Don't Be an Abstract Christian

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Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Among Christians, there are those who live by superficial principles or abstractions. That which is abstract or theoretical lacks substance. Abstract leadership lacks strength to stand when the enemy comes in like a flood, as when Saul faced Goliath (1 Samuel 17:4-11). Abstract love lacks divine substance; it sets conditions. Yet, when Jesus Christ said, "I love you with an everlasting love," He was saying, "There is nothing abstract about My love for you. When you think that you are unworthy of My love, that you have gone too far, I will go where you are and I will draw you with cords of unconditional love."

An abstract Christian is one who is not properly prepared to face the details of life with God. He may say things that sound right, but because he lacks the practical, concrete, unconditional love of God, he is quick to judge others who do not live according to his standard. He puts his pain or circumstances ahead of Calvary. He may

enjoy fellowship in the local church, but he doesn't experience the practical blessings of Christianity in his daily life. As a result, he is easily moved.

This booklet describes how important it is for believers to cling to the concrete, practical, objective promises of God. These are the things that stand in the midst of any storm.

Chapter One

REPAIRING WOUNDED CAPACITIES

“The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me” (Song of Solomon 5:7).

“For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous” (Jeremiah 30:12).

“For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after” (Jeremiah 30:17).

When wounded spirits are not healed, people tend to be abstract in their relationships. Recently, a young man came into my office in need of counseling. He was struggling in school, and I could sense that he was hurting.

“Two years ago, my father left my mother

and me, and we haven't heard a word from him," the boy told me in tears. "I feel so empty."

The father's leaving had left this boy living in an abstraction toward God that affected his interactions at Christian school. His wounded feelings controlled his responses. He was not a bad child, just abstract in his relationship with God.

Scars That Linger

"Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound" (Isaiah 30:26).

A woman wrote to me about the terrible molestation she endured for three years. Her father would go to her room and sexually abuse her, which severely wounded her emotions.

She told me of how she had never been able to get hold of God personally, though she had received Jesus Christ as her Savior. The problems were magnified after she was married. She would hear her husband walk up the stairs, and back would come the memories of her father's footsteps.

Isaiah 30:26 speaks of the stroke of a wound and the breach it creates that only God can heal. The stroke speaks of the mind and emotions being beaten repeatedly. The strokes of this woman's childhood caused a breach in her marriage. She was living in what her father had done to her, though many years had passed since she had seen him. Obviously, the pain and the agony she went through was tremendous (Jeremiah 30:12).

"I have never told my husband about this. I have defrauded him and I argue with him for no apparent reason," she said. "I have been a terrible nag to him because every day of my life has been a replay of what happened when I was growing up."

She has begun to receive counseling, and I believe she has also begun to receive her healing.

The Word Sets Us Free

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

Many pastors have experienced these kinds of situations. One woman told me she gave in to her stepfather's sexual advances just to keep the monster from doing the same thing to her younger sisters. It is easy to see how these wounds and bruises bring in such an abstract capacity in people's lives.

Still, I have met so many men and women who have courageously overcome these traumas and refuse to let themselves get taken back into bondage. They have come through so beautifully, and we are so proud of their hearts toward God. The Lord has healed their wounds and their broken hearts. He has taken the shards of shattered lives and put them together again. They are seamless in their beauty, as only the Lord can repair such broken lives.

Chapter Two

AN OXYMORON: A LIVING SACRIFICE OR THE LIVING DEAD?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

We have been dealing with the term “oxymoron” in our recent studies. An oxymoron is defined by Webster as a combination of contra-

dictory or incongruous terms. It is a figure of speech that represents contradictory ideas, such as “thunderous silence” or “sweet sorrow.”

Literally, the Greek root means “pointedly foolish.” Many Christians live a life that could be described as an oxymoron. They could be described as “shameful believers,” “the resurrected dead,” saved people living as if they were lost—sometimes falling into adultery, fornication, or addictions.

What are you like in your marriage? Do you consistently demonstrate and manifest God’s love through your life, or are you unkind? As a believer who was saved by grace, do you love to find opportunities to share Christ? Or, do you find that you hardly dare to share what God has put within you? If the latter is the case, you are a living oxymoron.

God has a perfect, glorified resurrection body waiting for you, yet you are destined to be ashamed, because the motives of your heart will be revealed at the Bema Seat. There, the Lord will unfold a spiritual evaluation of your life. The number one criteria for His evaluation will be, “How did you appropriate My Word and My grace in your life?”

Bema Seat Evaluations

This is quite a subject to ponder. What will these people experience at the Bema Seat, that moment in eternity when Jesus Christ evaluates the production of their lives? I imagine they will, for a moment, experience shame in the perfection of their resurrection bodies. Each Christian will come to the Bema Seat all alone to receive the rewards for the things done in his body. Some questions will be posed:

Did you go soul winning?

Did you take advantage of hearing the Word preached whenever it was possible?

Did you purpose to live a pure life, and did you rebound when you failed?

All of the evaluations are going to be based upon how we presented our bodies through the mercies of God, reflecting the activities and decisions of our minds.

Chapter Three

PURE SUBSTANCE: THE OINTMENT OF LOVE

“The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious” (Proverbs 12:27).

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Psalm 22:14-15).

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

“But he was wounded for our transgres-

sions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:2-5).

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:7-9).

I was thinking of the pain that Jesus went through. His heart was broken; He was so wounded, so shamefully treated. Yet, He did not sin. He nearly died in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He experienced so much pain—perhaps even more pain than He experienced on the Cross.

Jesus was wounded by His own disciples. The eleven forsook Him, went up the hill and watched Him die. Their relationship to Him at those moments was totally abstract. The concrete substance of the Holy Spirit shedding love abroad in their hearts was missing. That would come at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would

fill all of them in that upper room (Acts 2).

There is nothing worse than having people turn against you, especially in a church. One of the most difficult things a pastor will go through is being wounded by people he loves. When some start to plot against you, you can sense Satan behind your back. These are wounds you do nothing to deserve, wounds without transgressions (see Job 34:6).

It is very precious when we allow these kinds of wounds to be healed by the ointment of love in all of its substance.

The Power to Forgive

Richard Wurmbrand, the late Romanian evangelist who spent years in Communist prisons, told this story. He was talking to a German soldier shortly after World War II.

“What has your life been like?” Wurmbrand asked the soldier.

The soldier responded by naming all the places where he killed Jews. He spoke of one city where he helped kill every Jewish person there.

“Would you like forgiveness?” Wurmbrand asked him.

“What? There is no God, so there is no forgiveness. There is no God, and there is no sin.”

“We will see,” said Wurmbrand who then went upstairs to wake up his wife, Sabina, and brought her downstairs to meet the soldier.

“Sabina, I would like to introduce you to the soldier responsible for killing your mother, your father, your two brothers and your two sisters. Here he is.”

Immediately, Sabina knelt down and began kissing the man’s feet, saying, “I forgive you. Please, I would love to make you dinner. Will you stay?”

This woman had godly substance through the power of love and the power of forgiveness. She lived and experienced a relationship that went beyond circumstances, situations, and pain. She simply trusted her Savior.

Charity Triumphs

I can remember having dinner with the Wurmbrands once, and I watched how this woman waited on her husband. I studied how she watched every one of his moves just to make sure he was okay.

What an amazing thing to see one man and one woman living beyond the natural concepts of love. Everyone experiences times when they are afraid to love with their whole heart. I re-

member being in a place where I felt as if I could not trust one person living on this earth. I really feared trusting until God brought me out of it.

"You will have to trust Me for the people you can't trust," He said to me.

"How do I know that circumstances won't turn them against me?" I said to Him.

"You will just have to trust Me."

I did trust God, and I am thankful that I can say it works.

Charity never failed in Sabina Wurmbrand's life. "You killed my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters—I forgive you. Let's eat."

By the way, I believe the soldier did gloriously accept Christ at that dinner table. That is the crucial part of the story, of course. He said, "I can't understand how you can love me. But now, I can see in you the God of love."

The Lengths Love Will Go To

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

"But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the

rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.

“For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ:

“Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men’s labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly,

“To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s line of things made ready to our hand.

“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (2 Corinthians 10:12-17).

How did God the Father measure the Son’s love? The Father measured the Son’s love by the fact that He gave His life for us.

How does God measure our love? He measures it by how willing we are to give of His love and to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

Love that preaches the Gospel in regions beyond us, a love that takes the Word into the whole world, is a love that is more than theoretical. This love has substance. God measures peo-

ple by seeing how far they will go in presenting their bodies and taking their love to the world.

God measures a marriage by seeing how far a husband's love will go toward making it a continual honeymoon. There are no unkind words between the couple—they go on in quietness, gentleness, and edification. This is a marriage of substance. They live in the substance of the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

All conspiracies in local churches are based on abstractions—concepts and notions that lack the substance of love. Be careful in your relationships with your peers. You probably have friends who are the same age and you get close to many of them. But before you know it, a few may become abstract in their convictions, and the substance of godliness will be absent in their fellowship.

Let your relationships be established on things that are true and godly. Guard against familiarity, so that each one is a relationship of substance.

Keep your communication in heavenly places. Speak of the blessings you have received, of what God has done for you. Let your love go beyond the abstract. That love, communicated in the tenderness and gentleness of the Holy Spirit, carries the substance of Jesus Christ.

God Really Cares For You

Jesus loves you deeply. However, the fact that all have sinned separates us from God (*Romans 3:23; 6:23*). Still, God cares for you and He provides a way to share His love with you.

Jesus Christ's love for man was so great that He came and died on the cross for all the sins of mankind. He shed His blood for you so you can be forgiven and have eternal life.

The only thing He requires of you is to come to Him in simple faith trusting His character and love for you, and accepting Him as your Savior. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (*Acts 2:21*).

Simply pray, "*Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I receive you as my personal Savior. Thank you for loving me so much that you died for me so I can have eternal life with you. Amen.*"

He promises that He will never stop loving you and that He will never leave nor forsake you (*Hebrews 13:5*). Develop your relationship with Him by reading the Bible, praying, and attending a good Bible-believing church.

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