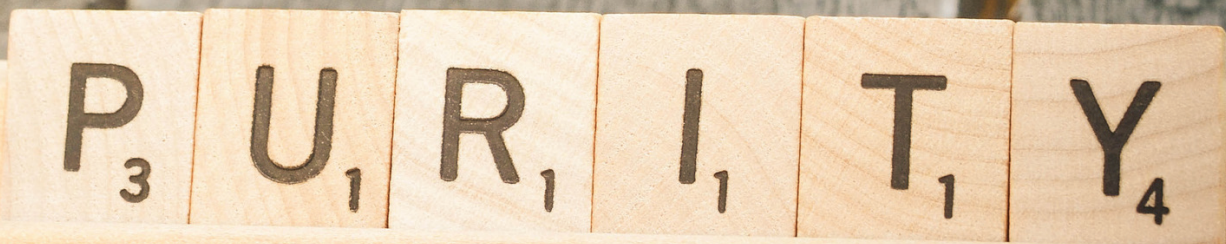


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“Be holy for I am holy”

1 Peter 1:15



THE CHARACTER CRISIS



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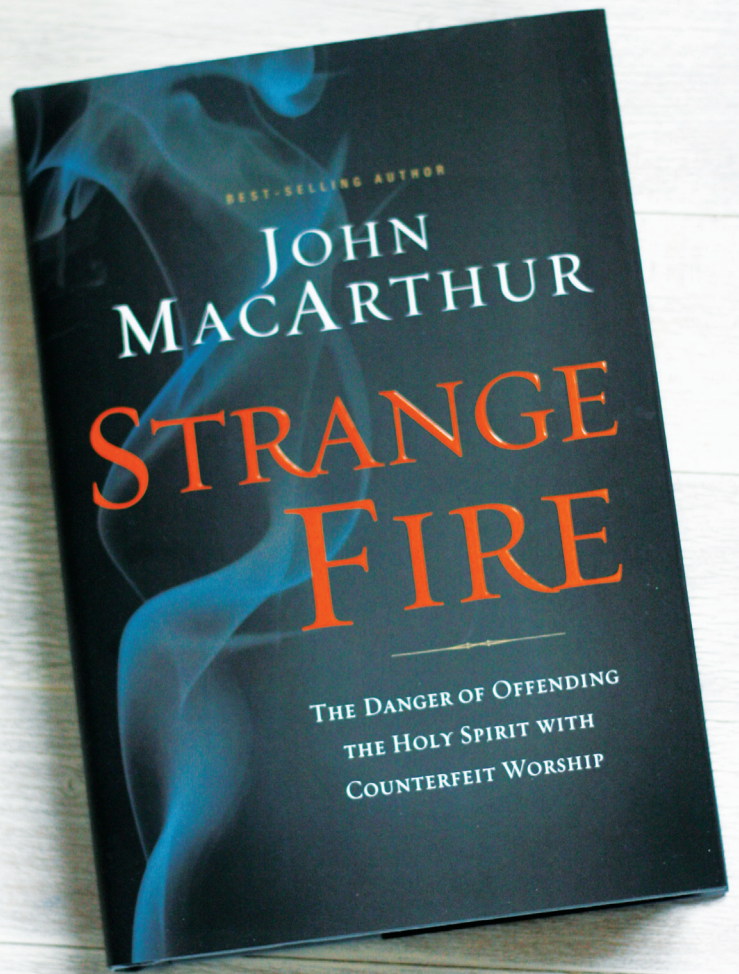
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For decades, in the interest of unity in the gospel, evangelicals have downplayed or set aside doctrinal differences with the charismatic movement. Today, charismatic teaching is so widespread that it is often the default doctrinal position and is rarely challenged. Christians are being taught that as long as we are “gospel centred,” what we teach about the Holy Spirit and His work does not matter. Of course, it does matter. And what’s at stake is nothing less than our understanding of salvation and sanctification, and our view of Scripture’s authority. In his new book, *Strange Fire*, John MacArthur critiques the charismatic movement, exposing the faulty - and in some cases blasphemous - teaching and practices that are misleading hundreds of millions of people. His biblical defence of the Person and work of the Spirit will equip you to discern the errors of charismatic teaching, help you minister to those caught up in the movement, and will deepen your understanding of and love for the Spirit.

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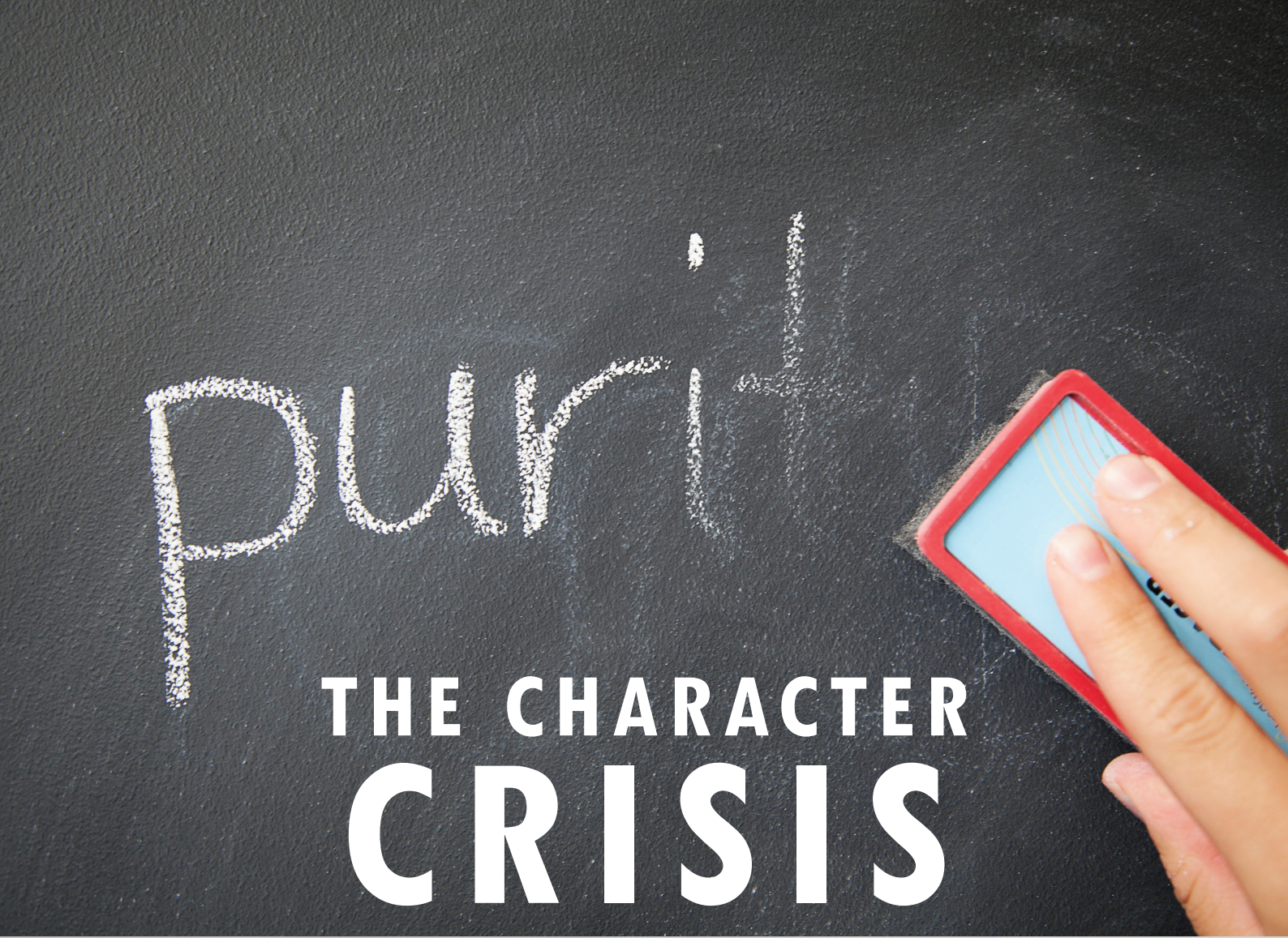
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THE CHARACTER CRISIS

By John MacArthur

Society has suffered terrible decay as the love of iniquity has trumped noble character. Sadly, what Western culture once regarded as virtuous and good has become almost unrecognizable. Take a few minutes to consider the importance of character, find its source, and commit yourself to the quest - the quest for character.

Character

Character. It has an old-fashioned sound to it, like a faded relic of the Victorian era. We live in a materialistic culture where prestige, prosperity, and popularity are valued more than genuine integrity. In fact personal character hardly seems to matter very much at all nowadays - at least in the realms of mass media, entertainment, politics, and pop culture.

Only a few select moral qualities are still prized by society at large. They are chiefly liberal community values such as

diversity, tolerance, and broad-mindedness. Sometimes they are even called virtues. But when traits like those are blended with hypocrisy or employed to justify some other iniquity, they become mere caricatures of authentic virtue.

Meanwhile, genuine individual virtue - the stuff of which true, timeless, praiseworthy character is made - has been formally relegated to the sphere of "personal" things best not talked about openly. These days, even an elected national leader's personal character is supposed to be treated as a wholly private matter.

As a result, our society's most prominent celebrities include countless people who actually are known best for gigantic character flaws. Notice, for example, the people who usually grace the covers of celebrity magazines; very few are decent role models. Often they are actually people who exemplify the worst kinds of character traits. No morally sane, thinking parents would ever hope for their own children to emulate



**'...hold fast what is
good. Abstain from
every form of evil'**

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

the lifestyles or embrace the values of most of our society's best-known figures. Big personalities are highly revered anyway, because celebrity itself counts more than character in a society without any moral anchor.

In fact, over the past few decades so many famous people in our society have been charged with serious crimes that a cable television series is devoted exclusively to covering stories about the legal problems of some of our culture's favourite figures. Still, both the public and the media continue to confer celebrity status on more and more bizarre characters.

How Have We Come to This?

How have we come to this? The greatest cultures throughout human history have always reserved the highest positions of eminence and respect for true heroes - people who distinguish themselves by great self-sacrifice, moral excellence, or some truly great accomplishment. The only societies that confer celebrity status on immoral and villainous people have been cultures in serious decline and on the precipice of utter ruin. One of the universally understood rules of thumb that governed western society until a few short decades ago was that people

who achieved fame had a duty to be wholesome role models. Even men and women who weren't really of sterling virtue in private sought to keep their character flaws hidden from the public - because if their moral defects became known, they lost their star status. Political figures could not remain in office if they were found culpable for any scandalous moral indiscretion.

Glorifying Evil

That is no longer the case. Today's celebrities proudly flaunt their decadence. With the rise of a massive entertainment industry in the second half of the twentieth century, celebrity became a cheap and shallow commodity. Honest character is now seen as totally optional - or worse, hopelessly unfashionable. As a matter of fact, in certain segments of today's entertainment and music industries, authentic virtue would be practically incompatible with fame and success. Some of the best-known figures in the recording industry, for example, are avowed gangsters who openly glorify evil in their lyrics. It is frightening to contemplate the future of a society where so many people so badly lacking in character can attain celebrity status so easily - and often hang onto their fame and influence no matter what crimes they commit.

Fallen Society

The Bible says that is exactly what happens when a society rejects God and thereby incurs His righteous judgment. Romans 1:21-32 describes the downward path of a culture abandoned to sin. Take note of the roster of evils that finally overwhelm every fallen society. The list closely resembles everything currently fashionable in the world of entertainment and celebrity:

'Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.' Romans 1:28-32

That describes our culture to the letter, doesn't it? People today literally entertain themselves with iniquity, heedlessly applauding those who sin most flagrantly. Society today makes celebrities of people who in our grandparents' generation would have been deemed the most contemptible rogues. Almost everything that used to be considered shameful is now celebrated. We therefore live in a culture where personal character and individual virtue are rapidly evaporating at almost every level. Virtue and infamy have traded places.

Hold Fast What Is Good

According to the Bible, God designed us to be men and women of exemplary character. He repeatedly commands us to pursue what is virtuous and shun what is evil. From cover to cover in Scripture, iniquity is condemned and virtue is exalted.

Clearly, we are supposed to be men and women of excellent character. We're commanded to "hold fast what is good [and] abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

But where do we go to learn how to do that? Popular culture will not point the way for us. Scripture alone is a reliable lamp for our feet and light for our path (Psalm 119:105). God's Word points the way in the quest for character.


The Bible contains numerous lists of positive character qualities. 2 Peter 1:5-8, for example, gives a catalogue of virtues and urges us to add to our faith. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, the qualities of authentic love in 1 Corinthians 13 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 all list similar traits that describe true excellence of character.

The Beauty of Christ's Character

Truly excellent character is actually a reflection of the moral nature of God Himself. For that reason, all virtues are interdependent and closely related. And all of them are the fruit of God's grace. As you study biblical virtue, may you perceive the true beauty of Christ's character and desire to see it reproduced in your own life.



Recommended reading - The Quest for Character
See inside back cover for more details

A pink watercolor background with a silhouette of a hand reaching upwards. The text is centered over the hand.

**“WALK BY
THE SPIRIT,
AND YOU WILL
NOT GRATIFY
THE DESIRES OF
THE FLESH”**

GALATIANS 5:16



PERSONAL HOLINESS

By John Cheeseman

There can be no doubt that, based upon the proliferation of fads, gimmicks, and other questionable practices within the contemporary church, many church leaders have ceased to have confidence in the preaching of the gospel as God's way of salvation, and so they obscure its offence in a desperate attempt to retain existing members and attract new ones. One of the more serious consequences of this absence of faith in the sovereignty of God is evident in the lack of sanctification amongst those who profess to be Christians. Personal holiness, once considered an essential fruit of authentic conversion, is now regarded as an "optional extra" or something only practised by a spiritually elite few. Whilst previous generations of Christians had a profoundly positive impact upon society because they were willing to be distinctly different, it appears

that many Christians today just want to blend into the prevailing culture. In the following article, John Cheeseman examines what the Bible teaches concerning holiness and how that must be practically applied in the life of each and every Christian.

Personal Holiness – the Obligatory Requirement for All Christians

"Holiness" seems to be a word that is out of fashion amongst many professing evangelical Christians today. One reason could be that the word has been associated with being "so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good". Some people imagine

holiness like a stained-glass window, where the saint hovers a few feet above the ground and looks beautiful, but doesn't have any contact with reality. Of course, we've all known people who have confused "up-rightness" with "up-tightness", and consequently given holiness a bad name.

God is Holy

Holiness, in its biblical sense, means being separated from sin and being set apart for God; God is "holy" (Leviticus 19:2), which indicates that He is separate from His creation. Nowhere is this "separateness" more clearly evident than in God's complete and utter purity. The prophet Habakkuk says that God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Hab. 1:13). How we need to grasp this important truth in our generation when we are very often casual and lacking in reverence when worshipping God.

We fail to take sin as seriously as we should, and one of the reasons for this is that we have lost sight of the fact that we are dealing with a God of blazing holiness, to whom sin, in any shape or form, is utterly repugnant. Some of us have little conception of what a vile thing sin is in the eyes of a holy God. Think of those animals whose smell is most offensive to us. They don't have any idea of just how offensive they are, because they are not offensive to one another. I'm sure that nothing will astound us more when we get to heaven than the view we shall then have of sin and the awful realisation of our failings and shortcomings during our earthly pilgrimage. We shall then be filled with wonder and amazement that a God of such matchless holiness should choose to save wretches like us.

Be Holy

The apostle Peter writes in his first letter, "as He who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy for I am holy"" (1 Peter 1:15). Since the root meaning of the word is "separate", this means that as Christians we are to be set apart and different from the non-Christian world – not "awkward" and "angular", not "weird", but different in the sense that we follow a special code of behaviour. We follow God's standards as prescribed in His inerrant word. Holiness, when rightly understood, is a very attractive quality, not something forbidding and inhuman. James Philip writes as follows: "The greatest saints of God

have been characterised, not by haloes and an atmosphere of distant, unapproachability, but by their humanity. They have been intensely loveable people, with a twinkle in their eyes. One has only to read the biographies of men like Moody or Spurgeon or Hudson Taylor to see how true this is." (J. Philip. Christian Maturity, 1964 IVP)

Experiencing Victory

The holy person is someone who experiences in the here and now a very real measure of victory over sin and temptation. Just as "uncleanness" is a general word for the life of sin, so "holiness" includes all the positive virtues God intends for us as Christians. It is in fact one of the chief purposes of our election, since God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him." (Ephesians 1:4). Moreover, it is commanded for every Christian without exception. It was to the ordinary members of the church at Thessalonica, not to some religious elite, that the apostle Paul wrote: "This is the will of God, your sanctification." (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Pursue Holiness

The relentless pursuit of holiness is one of the supreme quests in which a Christian is to be engaged. We are not primarily to seek happiness, although this will come our way as a by-product, as Jesus Himself promised, "Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for goodness, for they will be fully satisfied" (J. B Phillips. Matthew 5:6). Holiness, not happiness, must come first, because it is essential, not optional, to our salvation. "Pursue ... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14). No one who is careless about this is entitled to any assurance of salvation. Indeed, it would be an unwarranted presumption to imagine that we can enjoy forgiveness and receive eternal life without any intention to be made holy. So, any professing Christian who is unconcerned about holiness ought in all seriousness to heed the advice of the apostle Paul: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Being Different

One of the greatest contrasts between the Christians of today and the Christians of former generations lies in this whole

matter of being different from the non-Christian world. Many Christians today want to be popular, they want to be just like everybody else, and so the distinctions between the church and the world are becoming increasingly blurred.

This is tragically demonstrated by those churches, so desperate to gain popularity with the world that they have resorted to hosting stand-up comedy evenings as a form of evangelistic out-reach. How do you transition from making someone howl with laughter on Saturday night to causing them to weep over their sins on Sunday morning?

There is nothing remotely funny about a person being cast into eternal hell because they have offended our holy God, yet some foolish church leaders have lost confidence in the gospel to the extent that they think they can grow their congregations through a “ministry of fun”.

Reflecting the Light

In contrast to such utter nonsense, true Christians are meant to be like Moses, who went up on the mountain to meet with God, and when he came down, his face was shining and radiant, reflecting the holiness of God. (Exodus 34:29-35). When the children of Israel saw this they were overawed, and Moses had to put a veil on his face when he spoke to them.

This principle has some important ramifications for modern Christians. We are to flash the light of God's holiness in a world of sin and darkness. Jesus said, “Everyone practising evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (John 3:30). As Christians we are to expose the evil in the world around us - not immerse ourselves in it!

Sadly, because many Christians today don't want to swim against the current of the prevailing culture, they end up aligning themselves with it, mostly through apathy and indifference rather than deliberate intention. Just as the powerful beam of a lighthouse penetrates the surrounding darkness in order to warn mariners of submerged reefs that will wreck their vessels, so we need to urgently warn men and women that they are heading for the rocks of eternal destruction by exposing them to the pure light of the gospel. We need to regain the confidence that the Lord does honour His word as it is unashamedly preached (1 Corinthians 1:21) and genuinely obeyed by those who profess to be followers of Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Take Drastic Action

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus Christ lays down some very important principles that relate to Christian holiness. It's worth exploring these, as they have much to teach us about overcoming sin and temptation. “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (Matthew 5:29). The offending eye and hand symbolise all those things which are liable to lead us into sin, and Jesus is saying in effect: “Take drastic action in getting rid of all those things which are likely to be stumbling-blocks in your battle against Satan.” Nothing should be allowed to come between us and our glorious destiny. If the most precious thing that we have is the cause of our sin, get rid of it. Half-way measures are no use. The surgery must be radical.

Now, we all have our own particular besetting sins, weaknesses, and failings, for which we need to repent rather than try to provide excuses, calling upon the Holy Spirit to help us eradicate them. If, for example, we suffer from a bad temper, and we know that this is most likely to be a problem when we cheat on our regular hours of sleep, then we should discipline ourselves to get to bed on time. Now that doesn't sound very spiritual, but it is scriptural. And there is an awful lot of scripture which doesn't sound spiritual! If we know that certain books, films or television programmes are a source of temptation to us, we need to be ruthless and refuse to read or watch them.

Of great concern is the large number of professing Christians who are addicted to internet pornography. If this is a particular problem for you, then initiate a plan of action to deal with it: Get a friend to install software on your computer to block unwholesome websites (and let them keep the pass codes), and situate your computer in an area where other people can observe what you are doing. Sounds simple, yet many pastors are struggling with addiction to internet porn because they are closeted away in their studies and accountable to no-one.

The Bible says, “abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). It doesn't matter what form it takes. Anything that I know which will have a negative impact upon my obedience to Christ, no matter what it is, I must either avoid it or actively resist it. And we must be strictly honest with ourselves in all this. Self-delusion is one of the enemy's greatest weapons. The nearer and more often you walk close to the edge of a cliff, the more likelihood that you will eventually fall off.

Go with the Spirit

Of course, none of these strategies for holy living will succeed apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and lives. This is why in Romans 8:13 the apostle Paul urges us to put to death the deeds of the body through the operation of the Spirit. Every true Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:9), consequently whenever we want to do the wrong thing or react in the wrong way, the Spirit of God opposes those wrong desires (see Galatians 5:17). Therefore, when you experience the conflict, go with the Spirit, even though the sinful nature doesn't like it. Walk in step with the Spirit. Follow those Spirit-prompted desires, don't grieve Him and cause Him to withdraw from you by resisting His gracious purifying ministry.

Sword of the Spirit

Having said this, we must never separate the Spirit from the word. Communion with God through the Holy Spirit is always maintained through the Holy Scriptures. The apostle Paul speaks of the word of God as "the sword of the Spirit." (Ephesians 6:17). All the joys and blessings of evangelical holiness are bound up with the truth of Scripture. If the Old Testament believer can say, "the law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver." (Psalm 119:72), how much more can we say it, with the whole of biblical revelation before us! If we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), then we need to keep our consciences sensitive to the teaching of the Bible.

Bring your sins to the pure light of God's law. In this respect, may I encourage a period of prayerful study of the Ten Commandments; and also take note of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ applies some of those commandments to the area of the thought life in the Sermon on the Mount. When you are tempted to feel at ease because you haven't said something unkind for a while, start reading our Lord's words: "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgement." (Matthew 5:22). When you begin to congratulate yourself that you haven't fallen into sins of open

immorality, read these words: "Whoever looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28). In this way the conscience is kept sensitive to the guilt and danger of specific sins.

A final word about the motivation for holiness: If you were to accompany the apostle Paul through a normal day, seeing him spending his energies and his faculties in self-sacrificing service for the Lord Jesus Christ, and at the close of that day you were to watch him drop exhausted to his place of rest, and you were to say to him, "Paul, what is it that really motivates you in your Christian pilgrimage; what is it that drives you on, day after day, to put Jesus first and to live a life of Scriptural holiness?", he would reply as follows: "If you want to know in a simple statement the secret of what drives me, it is this: 'The love of Christ compels me' (2 Corinthians 5:14). The love of Christ holds me in its grip; the fact that I stand in constant amazement that 'the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me.'" (Galatians 2:20).

For the genuine Christian there is no greater incentive to live a life of practical holiness than to realize exactly what it cost Jesus to secure our forgiveness and place in heaven. It was sin in you and me that caused the Eternal Son of God to sweat drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane. It was our sin that caused Him to endure all the agony and suffering to which He was subjected. It was our sin that caused Him to die upon a cross. That's how terrible a thing sin is, and we can never remind ourselves of this too often. If the love and the sufferings of Jesus mean anything to us, they should inevitably lead us to agree with the words of Isaac Watts:

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."*

If this glorious gospel motivation is the mainspring of our lives, then practical holiness will be the hallmark of our Christian walk.

(Unless stated otherwise, all Bible quotations are from the New King James version.)



Recommended reading - Standing Strong
See inside back cover for more details

A photograph of a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue sweater, looking down at a mask he is holding in his hands. The mask is a realistic representation of his own face, but with a wide, toothy smile, contrasting with his serious expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

A PROFILE OF INTEGRITY

By Mike Riccardi

For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in God-given simplicity and sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand. (2 Corinthians 1:12-13)

At the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul was facing false accusations against his character and ministry. False teachers, claiming to be Apostles of Christ, infiltrated the church at Corinth and in order to weaken Paul's influence for the sake of growing their own launched a full-scale assault on Paul's legitimacy as an Apostle. Much of 2 Corinthians is a defense of Paul's integrity as a minister of the Gospel; he begins that defense by declaring that his conscience is clear from the accusations being brought against him.

But he knows that it would have been too easy for hypocrites who have been seared in conscience to simply appeal to their conscience in order to get everyone off their backs. In 2 Corinthians 1:12-13, Paul explains that the testimony of his clear conscience is something more than a retreat to a private and inner sense of the state of his heart that no one can see or verify. His clear conscience is founded upon a real life of integrity. And that life of integrity is marked by a number of things.

Simplicity

First, Paul says he has conducted himself in simplicity. This is the Greek word *haplotes*. It means "singleness," "undivided-ness." It is simplicity as the opposite of duplicity. Paul used this term

in Colossians 3:22 to exhort slaves to sincerely obey their earthly masters, and not just to make a good show of things: “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity (or simplicity, same word) of heart, fearing the Lord.” In other words, don’t obey your masters in a merely external way; don’t labour in the duplicity of working heartily when your boss sees you, but then slack off when he’s not around. Obey with simplicity of heart—be the same person all the time, knowing that your aim is not merely to please men, but the Lord, before whose presence you always appear.

And so when Paul says he’s conducted himself in simplicity in his ministry to the Corinthians, it means that there were no complex parts to Paul’s character, as if he portrayed himself to be one person on the surface but underneath he was really someone else. There was no artificial exterior to Paul that you had to penetrate to get to the real him. There was no deviousness or underhanded scheming on his part to appear to be something that he wasn’t, so that he could take advantage of the Corinthians. With Paul, what you see is what you get.

Sincerity

Secondly, closely related to simplicity, Paul says he has conducted himself in sincerity. This is a fascinating Greek word: *eilikrineia*. It’s a compound word, from *helios*, “sun,” and *krino*, “to judge.” Literally: “judged by the sun.”

Now what sense does that make? Well, one of the largest industries in Paul’s day was the pottery industry. And, just like anything else, the various kinds of pottery differed in quality. The lowest quality pottery was thick, solid, and easy to make. But the finest pottery was thinner and therefore more fragile. Often, when thin pottery was being fired, it would crack in the oven. Now, rather than discard those vessels that were cracked, dishonest merchants would fill the cracks with a hard, pearly wax that would blend in with the colour of the pottery when it was painted. In ordinary light, no one could tell the difference. But when you held a piece of pottery up to the sunlight to test it, you would be able to see the imperfection, because the wax appeared darker than the rest of the vessel. Honest merchants would often stamp their products with the Latin term “*sine cera*,” which means “without wax.” And “*sine cera*,” is where we get our English word for “sincere.”

And so Paul says, “By God’s grace, my conduct is ‘sun-tested.’

You can hold up my life to the searching sunlight of God’s Word, and you’ll find no cracks in my character that I’ve tried to fill in with artificial wax. I’m not deceitfully scheming to appear one way before men while all the while being something different beneath the surface.” He even says in 2:17, “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” The man or woman of integrity lives their entire life in the searching, blazing light of the presence of God Himself. And held up to brightness of His light they are stamped *sine cera*, without wax.

Not in Fleshly Wisdom

Next, Paul says that he has not conducted himself in fleshly wisdom. Fleshly wisdom is the kind of worldly shrewdness and cunning cleverness that marks those who are selfishly ambitious—those who desire to put themselves forward and seize power, influence, and recognition.

In James 3:13–18, James contrasts true, heavenly wisdom with fleshly wisdom: “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

You see, the man of integrity doesn’t employ fleshly wisdom, pretending to be something he’s not so he can take advantage of people unto his own gain. He’s not motivated by jealousy, arrogance, and selfish ambition that seeks power and influence.

In the Grace of God

Instead, he conducts himself, fourthly, in the grace of God. Notice how sharply fleshly wisdom is contrasted to the grace of God here. They are mutually exclusive. If you are going to operate in fleshly wisdom, conniving and cunning in order to secure positions of influence, you are entirely outside of the grace of God. But if you are consciously submitting your life to

the holy, energizing power of God's grace, you'll speak like Paul did in 2 Corinthians 4:2, where he says, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

What You See is What You Get

And so Paul says, "I have conducted myself with integrity. My conduct has been marked by God-given simplicity and sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God." And then in the beginning of verse 13 he gives an example of that integrity. He says, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand." The false apostles accused Paul of vacillating (cf. 2 Cor. 1:17). They said that his yes was sometimes no and his no was sometimes yes; he wrote one thing but meant another; his letters were strong and impressive but he behaved very differently in person (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10)

And Paul says, "Not at all!" He writes nothing else than what they can read and understand. There's no need to read between the lines. There are no hidden meanings or secret agendas in his letters. There was no double entendre that the Corinthians had to decipher to get at his true intent. He wasn't "trying to communicate" something by cloaking his meaning in deceptive platitudes. As John MacArthur has said, "Paul wrote what he meant, and meant what he wrote. His letters were clear, straightforward, consistent, genuine, transparent, and without ambiguity."

How Do You Measure Up?

This is a profile of the life of integrity that is the recipe for a clear conscience. Now we need to ask ourselves: by this standard, are we men and women of integrity?

Do you conduct yourself in simplicity? Are you the same person on the inside that you present yourself to be on the outside? Or are you duplicitous? Do you only have a 'Christian' persona that you employ to impress your Christian friends and your pastors? Do you pretend to be something that you're not, because you're so infatuated with the praise of men that you've stopped laboring for the reward that God gives?

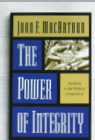
And do you conduct yourself in sincerity? If your life was held up to the sunlight of God's Word, would you be stamped sine cera, without wax? Or would the blazing light of God's own face reveal cracks in your character—cracks that show that you're pretending to be something you're not? Maybe you're trying to artificially fill those cracks with the wax of outward Christian morality—Church attendance, Bible study, spiritual talk. But underneath you know you're something else.

Do you repudiate fleshly wisdom? Do you renounce all disgraceful and underhanded ways? Or are you motivated by jealousy and selfish ambition that employs worldly cunning and carnal cleverness to take advantage of people to get what you want?

And when you communicate with people—whether in spoken word or in print—is your meaning always on the surface of your words? Can people get at your true intent and motivation just from hearing you speak? Or do you "play" people? Do you deceitfully couch your true intentions in double meanings in order to protect yourself or gain information? Do people have to read between the lines with you? Or is your speech marked "by the open statement of the truth" (2 Cor. 4:2).

This is what the life of integrity looks like. This is where a clear conscience comes from. May God deal with us through His Word, so that He might get what He is worthy of in His people, through Jesus Christ, by the sanctifying power of Holy Spirit.

Mike Riccardi is the Pastor of Local Outreach Ministries at Grace Community Church and also teaches Evangelism at the Master's Seminary.



Recommended reading - The Power of Integrity
See inside back cover for more details

AGAINST COMPROMISE

By John MacArthur

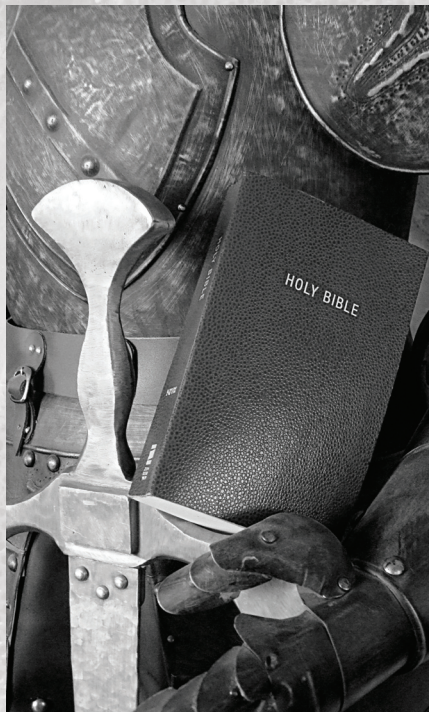
It was Martin Luther who said:

“The world at the present time is sagaciously discussing how to quell the controversy and strife over doctrine and faith, and how to effect a compromise between the Church and the Papacy. Let the learned, the wise, it is said, bishops, emperor and princes, arbitrate. Each side can easily yield something, and it is better to concede some things which can be construed according to individual interpretation, than that so much persecution, bloodshed, war, and terrible, endless dissension and destruction be permitted.”

“**Here is lack of understanding**, for understanding proves by the Word that such patchwork is not according to God’s will, but that doctrine, faith and worship must be preserved pure and unadulterated; there must be no mingling with human nonsense, human opinions or wisdom.”

“**The Scriptures give us this rule: ‘We must obey God rather than men’** (Acts 5:29).”

It is interesting to speculate what the church would be like today if Martin Luther had been prone to compromise. The pressure was heavy on him to tone down his teaching, soften



his message, stop poking his finger in the eye of the papacy. Even many of his friends and supporters urged Luther to come to terms with Rome for the sake of harmony in the church. Luther himself prayed earnestly that the effect of his teaching would not be divisive. When he nailed his 95 Theses to the door, the last thing he wanted to do was split the church. Yet sometimes division is fitting, even healthy, for the church. Especially in times like Luther’s--and like ours--when the visible church seems full of counterfeit Christians, it is right for the true people of God to declare themselves. Compromise is sometimes a worse evil than division. Second Corinthians 6:14-17 isn’t speaking only of marriage when it says,

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

*“Therefore, come out from
their midst and be separate,”
says the Lord.*



“You cannot grow true spirituality where the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross is absent. We must insist that the Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit. Where holiness is conspicuous by its absence, we should never attribute what is happening there to God’s Spirit because he is a spirit of holiness. Crowds and people falling backwards upon being touched prove nothing if holiness of life is missing. Jesus said, “You will recognise them by their fruits.”

Conrad Mbewe

WHY IS THE AFRICAN CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT THRIVING IN EUROPE?

By Conrad Mbewe

In sharp contrast to the chronic decline of the historical Protestant denominations, new Charismatic church planting organisations working predominately amongst Europe’s African diaspora are experiencing rapid growth. Many of the largest churches in the U.K and Western Europe no longer trace their heritage back to the Reformation of the 16th Century but present day sub-Saharan Africa. With his African perspective, Pastor Conrad Mbewe of Zambia helps us to understand the origins of this recent expansion.

Many explanations have been given for the explosion of the Charismatic movement in Africa. Many have seen this as a powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit. Whereas there is probably more than one reason, I want to add my own observation to this for what it is worth. In this article, I do not refer to the old conservative form of Pentecostalism once represented by the Assemblies of God churches. I have in mind the current extreme form that is mushrooming literally under every shrub and tree in Africa. How can one explain this phenomenon?

I think that one reason why the Charismatic movement in Africa has been like a wild bushfire is because it has not challenged the African religious worldview but has instead adopted it. It has simply baptised it with Bible verses and Christian words that previously meant something totally different.

The African Spiritual Worldview

Let me explain what I mean. The African spiritual worldview consists of four tiers.

1. God
2. Angels and demons
3. Ancestral spirits
4. Human beings

A faint, yellow-toned map of the African continent serves as the background for the entire page. The map shows major countries and cities, with a warm, golden-yellow color palette. The text is overlaid on this map, with some words like 'Africa' and 'Nigeria' being partially visible in a larger font size behind the main text.

The Charismatic Movement's Rendition

It is because of this reality that Africans do not question the existence of God, as is the case with many people in the Western world. To an African, God is there. He is the Creator and ultimate Governor and Benefactor of the whole universe.

Rather, in our spiritual worldview, although God is there he is very far away. Between him and us as human beings lie two layers in the spirit world. One is that of angels and demons (i.e. bad angels) and the other—which is even closer to us—is that of the spirits of the departed.

So, although God is a benevolent, loving, and caring being, unless the beings that dwell in these two layers that lie between him and us are appeased, his blessings cannot reach us. It is, therefore, important to appease the ancestral spirits and defeat the demons. Only after that will God's blessings come upon us.

Witch Doctors

This is where in African traditional religions witchdoctors come in. They are the people with the mysterious power to break through these two layers. They tell us what we must do in order to appease the spirits of our forefathers. They also engage the demons for us through their midnight trances, dances, and incense.

So, a person who is beset with perennial illnesses, failing to get a job, failing to find a spouse or to have children, whose business is failing to thrive, etc., simply goes to the witchdoctor who alone has the key to look into the spirit world. They are then told that it is either a deceased person or an evil spirit who is frustrating them.

Sometimes the enemy is a person who is alive. However, the reason why this living individual seems to have a mysterious hold over your life is because he has plugged into those two layers (of either dead ancestors or evil spirits) and you have not. With the help of a powerful witchdoctor you can outsmart him in those two layers, and the blessings of God can once again begin to flow into your life.

Whichever way, the power of the witchdoctor is not in explaining truth, but in mindless frenzy; his grip upon the popular mind is his eerie mysteriousness and his capacity to knock you out of your senses and then pronounce you delivered. Of course, this is never done by benevolence. You pay for his services.

I do not mean to be unkind, but what the modern Charismatic movement in Africa has done is to simply take this entire erroneous superstructure of African religious worldview and baptise it with wrongly applied Bible verses and Christian language. The only difference is that the layer of dead ancestors and evil spirits is now one hotchpotch of confusion. This is why the nonsense of demons becoming spirit husbands and wives, and wreaking havoc in marriages, is taken for granted! This is also why the heresy of generation curses has become so popular. In our minds, bad luck can be passed on from that layer of dead ancestors.

The “man of God”

In the African Charismatic circles, the “man of God” has replaced the witchdoctor. He is the one who oozes with mysterious power that enables him to break through those two impregnable layers, which we lesser mortals cannot penetrate. So, when blessings are not flowing our way, despite our prayers, we make a beeline to his quarters or his church for help. This explains the throngs in these circles. The crowds are not looking for someone to explain to them the way to find pardon with God. No! They want the “man of God” to pray for them.

This also explains the stranglehold that “men of God” have on the minds of their devotees in these circles. In the Evangelicalism of a former generation “men of God” were primarily preachers of the word of God, but in the new setup they are primarily priests who enter the inner sanctuaries to bring down blessings to us.

“Deliverance”

This also explains why the answer to almost any problem that you take to these “men of God” is “deliverance” and “breakthrough”. God wants to bless you, but you need to break through these impregnable layers before those blessings can reach you. The prayers of the “man of God” will bring deliverance because at the overnight prayer meeting or on the hill he will bring about a breakthrough. Who can doubt that these two phrases have become the key words of this movement?

This also explains why prayer in the modern Charismatic movement in Africa is literally a fight. In fact, the people praying are called “prayer warriors”. Although they begin by addressing God, within the first few seconds they divert from God and begin to fight the spirits in these impregnable layers with their bare knuckles. The language is almost always, “We bind every unclean spirit in Jesus’ name! We loose the Spirit that breaks the yoke in Jesus’ name!”

The “prayer warriors” scream at the top of their voices and chant the name of Jesus. They sweat as they put up a gallant fight with these spirits, straining every muscle of their beings until they prevail (so they think). That is when they reach through to God and his blessings begin to flow. This is nothing more than the African traditional religious worldview sprinkled with a thin layer of Christianity.

Chanting Phrases

Notice also how teaching is not the strength of the modern Charismatic movement in Africa. Its chief proponents survive on a few, well-worn, tortured verses: “By his stripes we are healed,” “We are not the tail but the head,” etc. There is absolutely no effort to properly exegete Scripture. Rather, by chanting phrases and making people drop under some trance, in witchdoctor fashion, they are holding sway over the popular mind. The people love it and are paying for it! The “men of God” are becoming stinking rich as the crowds just keep on coming.

This is not Christianity

What worries me is that this is so obvious that I am wondering why we are not seeing this. Or if we are, why we are not warning Christians against this? For the love of crowds, we have allowed African traditional religion to enter the church through the back door. Like the Arabian camel, it has since kicked out the truth. This is why I am not excited by the multiplication of churches—or ministries—under this banner.

We need to sound the warning that this is not Christianity. I know that this approach is filling our church buildings and classrooms to overflowing, until we have to multiply church services in order to accommodate the crowds. But this is not Christianity. It does not lead to heaven. It is a thin coating over the religion that has been on African soil for time immemorial, which Christianity was meant to replace. We have lost the Christian faith while we are holding the Bible in our hands and using some of its words. This is really sad.

The religion of the Bible does not teach a God who is so far away from us that unless some powerful humans come in and give us a breakthrough he cannot bless us. No! The Bible teaches a God who is near us. The only barrier between God and us is our sin, and Jesus has dealt with that by his death on the cross.

When we pray, we are in the throne room of divine grace talking directly to God. We do not need to address demons and ancestral spirits before we break through to him. We do not need to chant and jump like witchdoctors around their fire under the midnight moonlight. God is our heavenly Father. Only our sin can hinder our prayers.

Listen! Angels and demons exist, but they are not impregnable spiritual strata that need someone reeking with anointing to breakthrough their layer before we can access God’s blessing. They are simply beings that either carry out God’s commands or the devil’s commands. They are not between God and us!

Finally, we do not need “men of God” to lay hands on us every Sunday (or at Friday overnight prayer meetings, or on hills in the outskirts of our cities) in order for us to know God’s blessings. There is only one Mediator between God and us—it is the man, Christ Jesus. All others are imposters and must be rejected with the contempt they deserve.

This article by Conrad Mbewe originally appeared as “Why is the Charismatic Movement Thriving in Africa?” Regular postings on Christianity from an African perspective can be found on Conrad’s blog site, A Letter from Kabwata. www.conradmbewe.com



Recommended resources - Strange Fire
See inside front cover for more details

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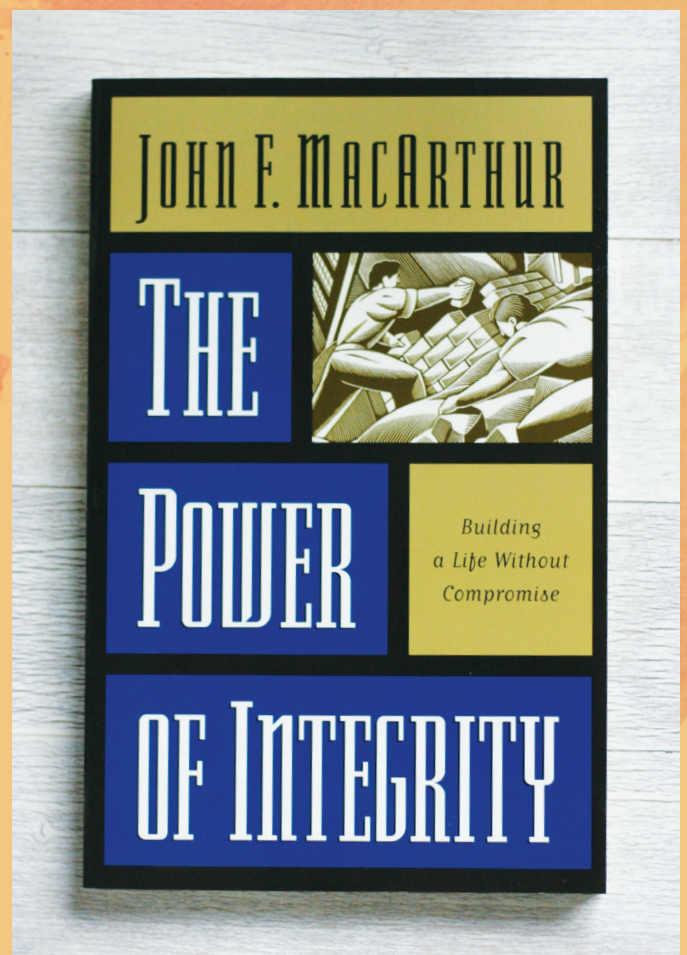
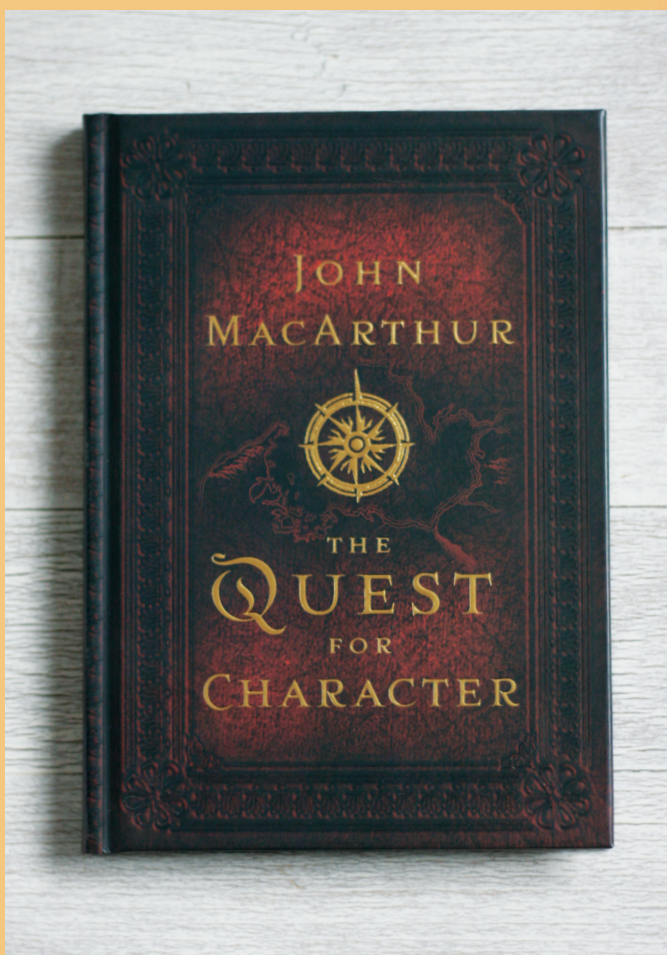
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STANDING STRONG

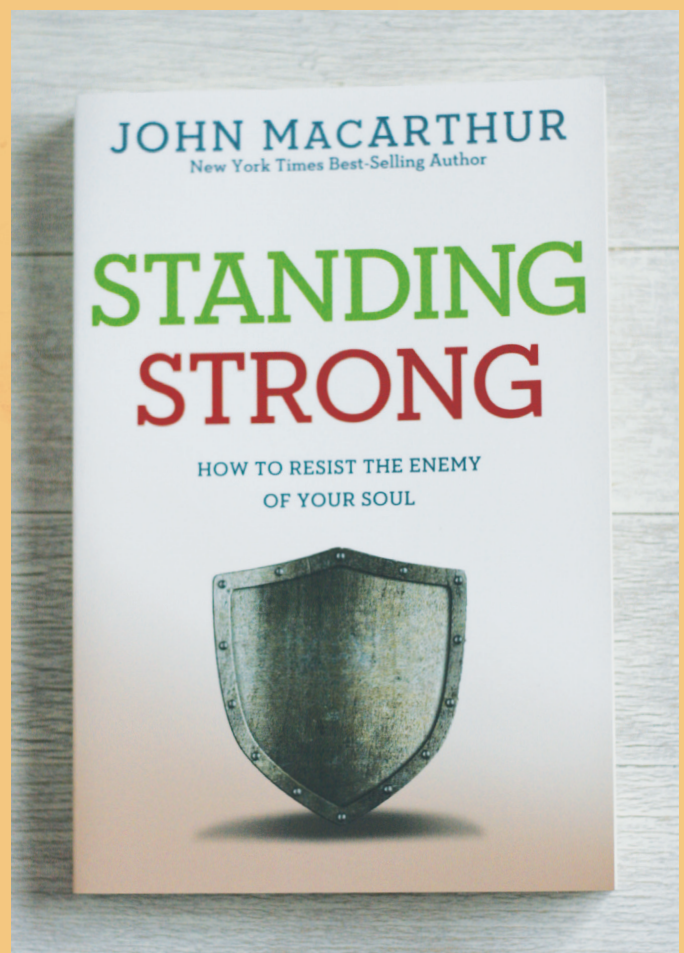
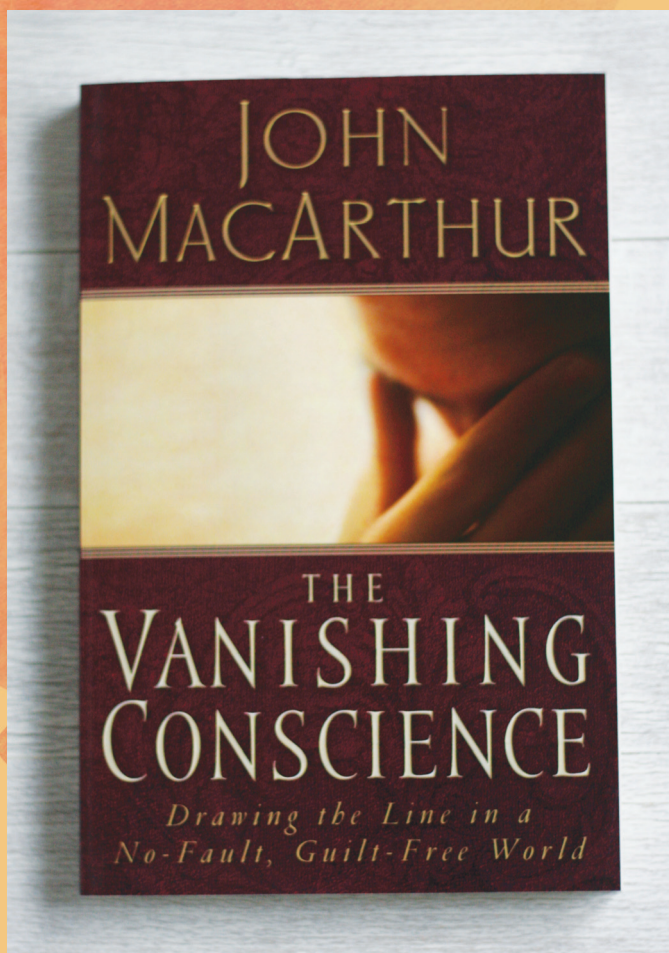
Many Christians believe we ought to ignore Satan and his army of demons. Others say we should be learning how to fight them and be on the offense, seeking to engage them in battle. But what does the Bible say?

In *Standing Strong* John MacArthur explores the origin of spiritual warfare, its present reality, and what our response should be. He thoughtfully examines what Scripture says about spiritual warfare, comparing God's Word to the beliefs, practices, and experiences of many involved in today's spiritual warfare movement. You'll learn to discern fact from fiction in this well-balanced study from one of the church's leading Bible scholars.

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"For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13)

ONE OF OUR PRINCIPAL TASKS IS TO PROTECT BELIEVERS FROM BEING...

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