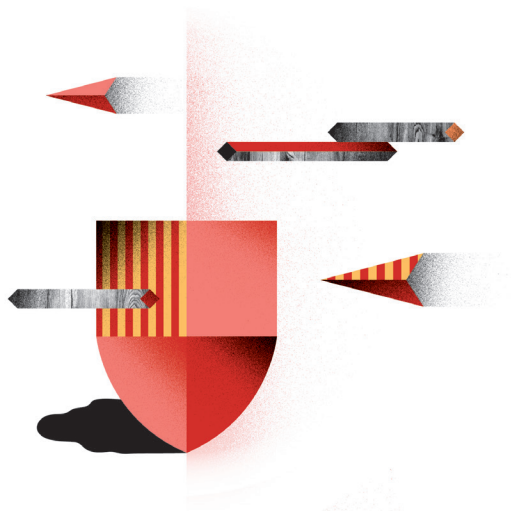


STAND FIRM



LIVING IN A POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE

**JOHN
MACARTHUR**

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—DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON
Founder and president
OnePassion Ministries, Dallas

**STAND
FIRM**

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JOHN
MACARTHUR



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Stand Firm: Living in a Post-Christian Culture

© 2020 by John MacArthur

Published by Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org

Printed in York, Pennsylvania

Maple Press

0000621

First edition, fourth printing

ISBN 978-1-64289-221-5 (Hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-64289-222-2 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-64289-223-9 (Kindle)

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Cover design: Metaleap Creative

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the Reformation Trust edition as follows:

Names: MacArthur, John, 1939- author.

Title: Stand firm : living in a post-Christian culture / John MacArthur.

Description: First. | Orlando : Reformation Trust Publishing, 2020. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019025529 (print) | LCCN 2019025530 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781642892215 (hardback) | ISBN 9781642892222 (epub) |

ISBN 9781642892239 (kindle edition)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian life. | Fortitude. | Christianity and culture.

Classification: LCC BV4509.5 .M2526 2020 (print) | LCC BV4509.5

(ebook) | DDC 248.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019025529>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019025530>

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MEANS BEING CALLED TO HOLINESS

The New Testament resounds with calls to holiness. We are told to abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11), mortify the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13), love not the world (1 John 2:15), flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), put off the old man (Eph. 4:22), and think on what is true (Phil. 4:8). We read commands to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16), to put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14), to buffet our bodies to bring them into subjection (1 Cor. 9:27), and to present our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). We hear the call of the Apostle Paul to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1), walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), and lay aside all bitterness, anger, and malice (Eph. 4:31). Peter quoted from Leviticus in his charge to live disciplined, godly lives: “Like the Holy One who called

you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16). Most Christians are well versed in those commands—we know them and we believe them.

However, familiarity and mental assent are not enough to produce righteous results. In fact, the church seems to be rapidly losing the battle for holiness and purity. Consider the worldliness that pervades the church today. Some congregations are virtually indistinguishable from the world; many more are moving fast on a similar trajectory. Others don’t necessarily wear their worldly affections on their sleeves, but their outward acts of piety and devotion cannot conceal the corruption within.

The reason is simple. The battle for holiness is not primarily about public professions and external displays. Rather, if God’s people are going to be holy, we must first win the battle on the inside.

The Highest Court of the Human Heart

When Paul was forced to defend himself to the believers in Corinth against the accusations of the false apostles, he did not appeal to the testimonies of friends and ministry partners to verify his virtue. He didn’t point to his miraculous works or the number of churches he had planted to validate his Apostolic credentials. Instead, he appealed to the highest court of the human heart. “For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in

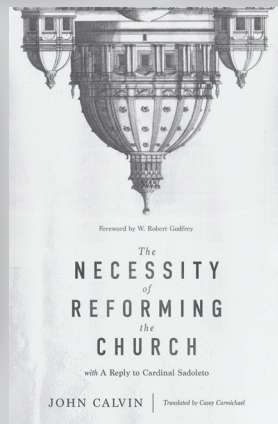
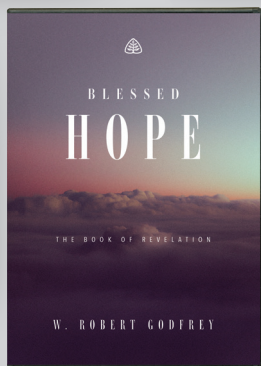
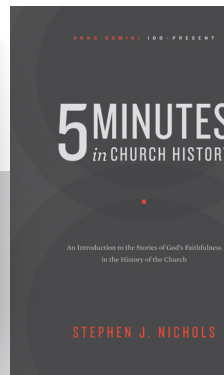
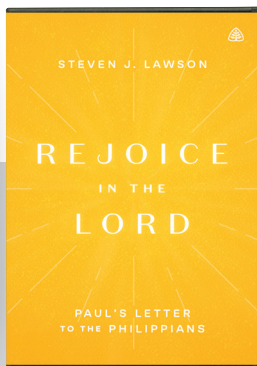
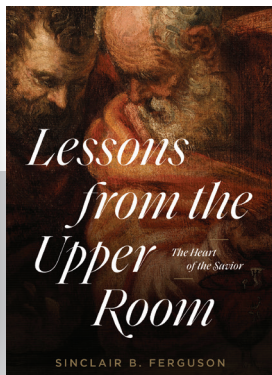
fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you” (2 Cor. 1:12). Paul called on his own conscience as his best defense.

The value of a clear conscience is a repeated theme throughout Paul’s ministry. In Acts 23:1, he said to the Sanhedrin, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” In Acts 24:16, he confessed to Felix, “I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.” And in 2 Timothy 1:3, he wrote, “I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience.”

In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul explained that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). He urged his young apprentice in the faith to “fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience” (vv. 18–19). He would later identify “holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (3:9) as one of the necessary qualifications for deacons.

Peter likewise understood the value of a clear conscience. In his first epistle, he charged his readers to “keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:16). External accusations cannot compare in intensity to the internal testimony of one’s own conscience. The Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes described the conscience as “the soul reflecting on itself.”¹ In the courtroom of the human heart, the conscience occupies all the roles. It is the *court reporter*, recording in precise detail everything we do (Jer. 17:1). It is our *prosecutor*, lodging complaints when we are guilty, and

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