

Authentic Fire vs. Strange Fire: It's Not About Winning an Argument

For the last three weeks I have been working day and night on a book entitled *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire*, and by God's amazing grace, it is completed and should be published in print and e-book format within the next three weeks.

But *Authentic Fire* is not just a rebuttal to what I believe are some of the major errors and misperceptions in the **Strange Fire** camp. The book is also an invitation to believers on all sides of the current debate to understand each other better, to learn from each other more and to help each other fulfill the Great Commission in the fullness of the Spirit.

It's not about winning a debate or proving the other side wrong (whichever side that may be from your perspective). It's a matter of humbling ourselves before the Lord and before one another, listening rather than fighting and honoring rather than attacking, even when we have to speak corrective words.

Isn't this what Jesus, the Head of the body, deserves? Isn't this what He expects?

Baptist evangelist Vance Havner, speaking of the Lord's description of the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2, had this to say:

"One may be as straight as a gun barrel theologically and as empty as a gun barrel spiritually. In fact, it may be that in their very opposition to evil men and **false teachers** these Ephesian saints had left their first love. ... So often it turns out that fundamental and orthodox Christians become so severe in condemning **false doctrine**, gnashing their teeth at every

sniff of **heresy**, that they end up without love. One may do a right thing in a wrong way. The same Paul who wrote, ‘... though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other **gospel** ... let him be accursed,’ also wrote the love chapter to the Corinthians. Unless we can get that combination we shall be theological Hawkshaws and doctrinal detectives, religious bloodhounds looking for **heretics** but with hot heads and cold hearts.”

Yes, it’s easy to say, “But it’s the other folks who are guilty of this, not us!” but then turn around and do the very thing we accuse others of doing. How does that advance the **gospel**? How does that glorify Jesus? How does it break the cycle of judgmentalism?

D.L. Moody once wrote to a colleague, “The only way any church can get a blessing is to lay aside all difference, all criticism, all coldness and party feeling, and come to the Lord as one man; and when the church lives in the power of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians I am sure that many will be added daily to the flock of God.”

Of course, this is easier said than done, but if we genuinely believe that we need each other and honestly believe that two are better than one and that a threefold cord is not easily broken (Eccl. 4:9-12), we will be much more willing to put down our boxing gloves and reach out a hand of fellowship and understanding.

In his open letter to Southern Baptists in 2007, missionary leader David Shibley noted, “When G. Campbell Morgan was asked if he was a fundamentalist he replied, ‘In doctrine, yes, but I abominate their spirit.’”

Morgan also said, “I seldom find men strenuously fighting what they are pleased to call heterodox teaching, and in bitter language denouncing **false doctrine**, without being more afraid for the men denouncing than for the men denounced.”

Did you get that? Sometimes our wrong attitude is more

dangerous than the wrong doctrine we oppose.

Yes, Morgan said, "There is an anger against impurity which is impure. There is a zeal for orthodoxy which is most unorthodox. There is a spirit that contends for **faith** which is in conflict with faith. If men have lost their first love, they will do more harm than good by their defense of the faith. Behind the denunciation of sin there must always be the tenderness of first love if that denunciation is not to become evil in its bitterness. Behind the zeal for truth, there must always be the spaciousness of first love if that zeal is not to become narrowed into hate. There have been men who have become so self-centered in a narrowness that they are pleased to designate as holding the truth, that the very principle for which they contend has been excluded from their life and service. All zeal for the Master that is not the outcome of love to Him is worthless."

All of us would do well to examine our hearts in light of these words, since our God calls us to reconciliation rather than retaliation.

I'll be sharing some excerpts from *Authentic Fire* in the next two weeks as we prepare for the book's release, but I encourage you to search your heart (just I have searched mine), asking our Father if you love the rest of the body—"the other side"—the way you love those "on your side."

Loving our friends is easy. Loving those we don't know and who are different than us requires grace, but it is freely available—and as disciples of Jesus, loving one another is not an option. It's a command.

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