

# **Does Character Really Matter?**

**Jon Burras**

**America was born on Puritan morality—right speech, right action and right thoughts. We are embedded as a Christian culture with the values that are overshadowed by the Bible and the Ten Commandments. These moral codes have guided us along our journey as a country and as a society. We have been reminded over and over again that our character is important and that one must work hard in order to maintain that clean character image.**

**All that changed in 2016. In the year 2016, a vicious and ugly presidential election campaign was witnessed not just by America but by the entire world as well. Name-calling, childish behavior and lies came to be the norm during this campaign. While the front runners in the election received much of the character-imploding attention, most of the candidates stooped down to new levels of self-embarrassment. As Donald Trump emerged as the victor in the election, many have questioned his character and his mental fortitude in his ability to be president.**

**While this new level of toxic politics has taken shape, what most people do not realize is that many world leaders, executives, politicians, athletes and celebrities themselves have had character issues and have still gone on to be very successful in their careers or in their abilities to lead a country, corporation or church. In the long run, while someone's outrageous words or behavior might make media headlines, a person's character might not matter that much after all.**

**For instance, Pope John Paul II was regarded as one of the most popular and charismatic popes in a very long time. He was worshipped and adored by millions of Catholics around the world. In fact, on April 27, 2014 Pope John Paul II was declared a saint in Rome. What many fail to realize is that during his long reign as head of the Catholic Church Pope John Paul II was responsible for the great priest sex scandal that left thousands of young men and women traumatized and cost the Church millions of dollars in payouts. The pope would knowingly deny the many sex allegations or minimize them while ordering his underlings to transfer priests to other parishes in order to hide their crimes. What kind of character is this?**

**The three prominent world leaders who helped stop Nazi Germany from taking over the world all had character issues. Joseph Stalin, the brutal leader from the Soviet Union, was responsible for killing millions of his own people after the war had ended. Franklin D. Roosevelt from the United States allegedly had affairs with five different mistresses while serving as President of the United States. According to many who served around him, Winston Churchill from**

Great Britain held many racist views where he believed that white Christians were at the top of the social pyramid and all other races and religions were somewhat inferior. Nobody seems to question each of these men's character in the history books.

War generals have had their own share of character issues. General George Patton was a key player in World War II, having led the American army to victory. General Patton was also reported to be very abusive and many of his soldiers distained him for his arrogance. Another war hero of World War II, General Douglas MacArthur, took a \$500,000 bonus payment from the Philippine government as a war prize for help in winning the war against the invading Japanese. In recent times, highly decorated General David Petraeus, former commander of the United States military forces in Afghanistan, allegedly had a mistress and shared confidential top-secret documents with her.

Politicians fair no better. John Edwards, a United States senator, was a leading candidate for President of the United States when it was discovered that he had a mistress and his mistress was now pregnant with his child. The Kennedy family have had their share of scandals and many still hold this family in high regard. President John F. Kennedy allegedly had affairs with no less than seven different women just while he was serving his shortened term in the White House before his untimely death. His brother, esteemed Senator Ted Kennedy, while always highly regarded in the Senate and across America, was involved in many scandals from infidelity to alcohol and drugs. His character could certainly be challenged but he seemed to be an effective leader in Congress.

President Bill Clinton was besieged by sexual scandals before he became president, during his presidency and allegedly even after his presidency. Most people still consider him a man of high character and a good leader for the country. Clinton's former vice president, Al Gore, has had his own (allegedly) sexual scandals that have hit the mainstream media outlets. Many still hold Al Gore in high regard for his accomplishments.

Civil rights activists are not off the hook either. Rainbow Push Coalition founder, Reverend Jesse Jackson, was a leader in minority issues and even paraded around promoting the idea of a strong intact family. Later it was revealed that Reverend Jackson had participated in an extramarital affair where he had fathered a child. Reverend Al Sharpton, civil rights activist, was involved in several unprecedented scandals. In one scandal he was alleged to owe over \$4.5 million in back taxes to the IRS and the state. Many still consider Reverend Sharpton as an honorable man who has done much good for his community. Martin Luther King Jr. was found guilty of plagiarizing when he was enrolled at Boston College. In another instance King's famous I HAVE A DREAM speech was found out not to be his own work but based on a speech taken from a famous black minister from

the 1950's named Archibald Carey. Martin Luther King Jr. (allegedly) cheated on his wife so many times that people around him stopped counting after a while. What kind of character is that?

Celebrities are not at a loss for scandal yet most people still revere them and go out to watch their movies and performances. Martha Stewart, considered the godmother of home enhancement, spent time in jail for stock market insider trading. Mel Gibson was recorded ranting on a drunken (allegedly) anti-Semitic rant. People still flock to see his movies and hold him in high esteem. Robert Downey Jr., at one time was written off and out of Hollywood because of his drug and alcohol issues. Today he is reportedly clean and one of the most successful and highest paid actors in Hollywood with his character of Ironman. Arnold Schwarzenegger, actor and former governor of California, had an affair with one of his maids and fathered a child. He is still one of the biggest movie star idols on the planet and his character is never placed into question.

Athletes are notorious for their scandals and dips in moral compasses yet we still hold them in high esteem. From college athletes stealing lap top computers and using illegal drugs to professional athletes of all sports cheating on their wives, failing drug tests and being arrested for rape or sexual battery, we still want to watch them perform. We wish to ignore their character defects if they can perform well on the field or the court.

Golfer Tiger Woods was discovered to be having affairs with many women yet he still receives millions in endorsement deals and he is the number one draw for fans on the golf tour. Basketball star Kobe Bryant was accused of rape yet fans all over the world still adore him.

We have members of the media who are criticizing another's character and they themselves have character issues. For instance, Democratic Chairwoman and former political pundit on CNN, Donna Brazile, was discovered through leaked emails to have passed debate questions on to Hilary Clinton before Clinton's upcoming debate. Why isn't her character being questioned? One left-wing media reporter was aghast at what he would tell his children after Donald Trump's victory. The assertion was that how could a man with such a foul mouth and such childish behavior have been elected to the presidency?

My advice to this news commentator and to others is to tell your children the truth for a change. Nobody is perfect. Nobody has ever been perfect or ever will be perfect. If you wish to use the category of character analysis for Donald Trump then you must be fair and use it for everyone, including politicians, religious leaders, celebrities, athletes, civil rights activists and even media personalities as well. Judge people on their overall actions and not just on their character.

I would refer along Biblical lines when referring to stoning parties of centuries ago where groups of ultra righteous citizens would stone

**to death those whom they did not agree with. "*He who is without sin may cast the first stone.*" First clean up your own character issues if you wish to attack and criticize another's character.**