

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

A Wolf in The Sheep Pen?

SHAWN POWERS



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Summary In The Intro

As of late January 2023, Redemption Hill has finally landed the plane on our sermon series through Christ's teachings on the Sermon on the Mount. For three chapters (and 30+ sermons), Christ rightly interprets the Law to show what it looks like to follow God. Our Lord teaches the beatitudes and tells men not to lust in their hearts after a woman who is not their wife. He also calls followers of God to love their enemies and to pray. These are a few topics, but the list is wide-ranging.

A Wolf In The Sheep Pen?

Podcast

From Cornfield Theology

Week over week, during this sermon series, I helped the saints of Redemption Hill to see that the ethics of God's Kingdom are different from the world. From the heart, Christ calls on Christians to be different from the secular ethics of the culture. In other words, there is a difference between the secular creed found on the yard sign two houses down and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381. The former creed will be replaced when it's not cool or convenient, and the latter has been stamped into history. It is a star that leads the way for Christian orthodoxy.

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I mention the Sermon on the Mount because after weeks of hearing Jesus correct the Pharasatical misinterpretation of the Law and the ethics that flow from the Law, our Lord pulls out the wood. The Lord Jesus states,

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. – Matthew 7:15

Jesus pulls out the lumber, swings, and does not miss. The warning could not be more precise. There are false prophets (and, I will add, teachers) who are leading people away from God and the teachings of God. But here is another problem. Sometimes it is easy to identify a false prophet or teacher. Find me a Mormon elder, and I will show you a false teacher. There are prosperity teachers that are unashamed of preaching a different gospel. To those teachers, the Apostle Paul reminds us,

There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. – Galatians 1:7

But what happens when a wolf looks like a sheep? It is easy to identify the Mormon elder. He knocks on your front door, and the moment you open the door, you see he is wearing black pants and a white shirt with a name badge. In his left hand is a Bible, and his right hand is holding a bike helmet. It is easy to mark and disregard this heretic. But what happens when the wolf looks like a sheep? The wolf preaches on Sunday morning, wearing khaki pants and a nice long sleeve shirt from Land's End. He is a smooth communicator and eloquent with his words (1 Corinthians 2:1). Now, there is nothing wrong with a teacher being a good communicator and wearing khaki pants. After all, he looks like the rest of the sheep. However, what if he questions the necessity of the virgin birth of Christ and the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible?

Houston, we have a problem.

What To Do With Heretics

Before someone gets their undies in a bunch because I ask questions about questionable teachings, I think it is essential to define a few terms. What do I mean by orthodoxy and heterodoxy? Here is how *The Pocket Dictionary of Theology Terms* defines both. Orthodoxy means,

Literally, “right praise” or “right belief” (as opposed to heresy). Being orthodox implies being characterized by consistency in belief and worship with the Christian faith as witnessed to in Scripture, the early Christian writers and the official teachings, creeds and liturgy of the church.

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Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 87–88.

Therefore, the words used by Shawn Powers on Sunday morning are tested against several metrics. The moment I say that Jesus is not the Son of God or that Jesus was not born of a virgin, I am a heretic. Easy enough to follow, eh? Now, how could we define a heretic? Back to the pocket dictionary. In it, we read,

Any teaching rejected by the Christian community as contrary to Scripture and hence to orthodox doctrine [is heresy]. Most of the teachings that have been declared heretical have to do with either the nature of God or the person of Jesus Christ. The term *heresy* is not generally used to characterize non-Christian belief. The term *heresy* is generally reserved for any belief that claims to be Christian and scriptural but has been rejected by the church as sub-Christian or antisciptural.

Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 58.

The Mormon who claims to be a Christian is a heretic. The Muslim practicing Islam is a Mulmin practicing Islam. All of that is easy enough to follow. However, the smooth-preaching pastor in khakis who says that the incarnation of Jesus is like putting on a space suit has spoken heresy. My atheist neighbor is not a heretic. He makes no claims of Christianity. He is just an atheist.

I hope I am clear about my scope. The wolf wearing sheep's clothing is the problem at hand, and I would argue a bigger problem for the church than the atheist worshiping the material or the Muslim practicing Islam.

Being A Nice Christian?

I have one more thought to tease out, and then I'll put a spotlight on modern-day heresy. Is it unkind and ungracious to point out a heretic? I am not talking about a pastor who fumbles over the language articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. The good Lord knows I have misspoken from time to time. No. I am talking about the teacher who is consciously undermining historic orthodox theology. I am talking about the guy who thinks he is clever because he thought of something new. I am talking about the heretical influencer that leverages his position to pull the wool over his listener's eyes. So is it unkind to name names? Do we see specific individuals being called out for teaching contrary to the truth in Holy Scripture? Here are a few examples.

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You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. – 2 Timothy 1:15

Why did Phygelus and Hermogenes turn away from Paul and the gospel? Someone was preaching “another” gospel. Here is one more example.

But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. – 2 Timothy 2:16–18

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As a general rule, I do not name names, especially when I preach. I generally do not name names because being reactionary is frequently unhelpful. Further, I prefer to address ideas as opposed to a person. But there are times when naming a name is necessary. It is necessary and loving so the flock can mark and disregard. The wolf needs to be kicked out of the sheep pen. Especially in this day of YouTube and social media, it has never been more critical to identify heresy. It would be unkind for a Christian pastor or leader to allow the wolf to remain, even on the Facebook feed.

A Wolf In The Sheep Pen?

For many years, a smell has come from North Point Community Church outside of Atlanta. But in recent years, the casual smell has turned into a stench. At first, the smell was like walking into your unkept grandparent’s house. It’s a little musty, but you don’t think anything of it. Ten to fifteen years ago, I would have told you that Andy Stanley is not my cup of tea. I read a few of his books, but it became clear that we were working off of a different sheet of music. In recent years the smell has turned into a stench, and it seems like it is coming from a garbage heap.

After years of falling off my radar, Andy Stanley made comments in 2018 that Christians need to “unhitch” from the Old Testament. As [Albert Mohler points out](#), Andy Stanley stated, “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.” Stanley claims that the early church did not have a Bible (Old Testament), and therefore we do not need one. He is right that the early church did not have the Bible as we know it today. However, his view is misguided and dangerous. Marcion of Sinope was a 1st-2nd-century heretic who believed the God of the old covenant (testament) was different from the new covenant (testament). He has other radical views, but many early church fathers resoundingly shot down his thoughts on the Bible. For different reasons, Stanley is making the same mistake. He is picking and choosing what he wants from Holy Scripture. Stanley is at the buffet line taking the prime rib but leaving the broccoli because he does not like broccoli. As Mohler points out in his

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article, Stanley is the new face of theological liberalism that swims in the stream of Herry Emerson Fosdick.

Another issue came up in December of 2022. Stanley dismissed the necessity of the virgin birth of Jesus. Here is a plug for [WWUTT](#), which succinctly explains the controversy. Stanley claims that if Jesus rose from the dead, it is not problematic if Jesus was not born of the virgin Mary. The admission is stunning and exposes a divergence with Holy Scripture, church history, and historic Christian creeds and confessions. Here is what the Nicene Creed affirms

*For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.*

From the AD 381 Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

The divines who wrote the Nicene Creed thought that the virgin birth of Christ was so fundamental to their faith that they mentioned it in what would become the most influential creed in history. Stanley is not engaging in the *Theotokos* controversy of the 5th century. He simply does not care about the virgin birth. Remember, Stanley is not an agnostic or atheist. He is a pastor of one of the largest churches in America. According to [outreach100.com](#), almost 25,000 people attend his “church.”

Back To Matthew 7

The passage I cited earlier from Matthew 7 continues to say,

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. – Matthew 7:16–20

The temptation for the American Christian is to count the number of fruit, and that is the metric of faithfulness. Butts in the seat and the number of Facebook views is the name of the evangelical game. But that is not what Christ is saying in Matthew seven. Bearing good fruit is not merely counting the number of people who raised their hands after every head was bowed. The metric to be applied is not numerical but health, particularly an

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ever-growing sense to trust and obey God. The sobering truth for Andy Stanley, and others like him, is made plain in the next verse.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 7:21

Whoa! I am not sure many saw these words coming from Jesus. But Jesus says these words because false prophets and teachers exist. At the end of the day, I do not know the heart of Andy Stanley. I don't know a thing about his relationship with God. But at the very least, I can judge the words that come out of his mouth. I can be critical of his ideas. I can judge what he teaches and warn the sheep of unsound teaching. And perhaps we can get a glimpse of his heart because out of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

Good shepherds, with the rod in hand, need to beat back the wolves. The statement from Jesus in verse 21 should cause us to ask, "Who then can enter the Kingdom of heaven?" Jesus does not leave us in a lurch. On the contrary, Jesus says the one who does the will of His Father is a part of the kingdom. What is God's will? God's will for Christians is to trust and obey the Law. Romans 13 lays it to us straight.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. – Romans 13:8–10

When someone lives by the 10 Commandments **of the Old Testament**, which is restated in the Sermon on the Mount, there is evidence of good fruit. There is love. But Stanley would have you believe otherwise. Not only is his view of the Bible deficient, other areas of his theology are suspect – to say it kindly.

The early church fathers, the reformers, and the puritans would place him on their Mount Rushmore of heretics, and I will throw my hat into their corner. But you can decide for yourself. At a minimum, his teaching must be marked and disregarded.

If you so desire, Logan Kane and I briefly spoke about modern-day heretics on a recent Cornfield Theology podcast. You can [find it here](#).

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