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Andy Stanley, Homosexuality, and the Hatefulness of Tolerance

BLAKE COMEAUX

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The Controversy

It seems like popular pastors are falling by the wayside. The church has seen no shortage of spiritual leaders capitulating to the whims of culture. The biggest issue that is leading young Pastors astray is the issue of how to speak about the LGBTQ movement. The complexities, pressure, and mass-cultural shifts of the past decade have put many pastors, especially in large urban centers, in precarious situations. This is a time when the moral fortitude of America's Pastors is being tested. Unfortunately, many of our most prominent shepherds are failing.

This past week, a video of Andy Stanley preaching at a conference last year has made its rounds. The dust up has taken social media by storm, and his church has even removed the sermon from their site, although [clips](#) can still be found across the internet. Sources have even come forward who claim to have had a private conversation with Stanley during a Q&A dinner for pastors, and in this conversation he goes even further than he

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did from the stage. These conversations were not recorded, but the sources seem reputable and are corroborated by multiple witnesses, although it is wise to take things like this lightly without video evidence (for a more detailed breakdown of the controversy, [Remnant Radio has a good episode](#) that covers the basics).

To be transparent, I have learned a lot from Andy Stanley over the years. He comes from a great legacy of faith; his father Charles being a staple of faithful ministry for decades. I can remember enjoying certain books and sermons that I've been exposed to over the last decade. I've appreciated his mentorship of pastors and preachers, and his emphasis on clear communication from the pulpit. I have even appreciated his staunch defense of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, and His emphasis on following Christ with all of our lives.

However, the last few years have seen a decline in Stanley's grasp on orthodox theology. It started with his comments on [allowing unbelievers to lead small groups at his church](#). He then made headlines by telling Christians that we need to "[unhitch](#)" from the [Old Testament](#), which sounds eerily familiar to the heresy of Marcionism.

It is clear from all of these controversies that Andy Stanley has allowed his passion for reaching the unchurched to blind him. That sounds weird to say, but in the name of evangelism, we can often begin to strip away Christianity's more difficult or controversial points. In the end, we may win people, but not to biblical Christianity. When we strip down the faith enough, we end up winning them to something different altogether; a lifeless and false faith.

J.C Ryle spoke prophetically about the spirit of our age:

There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have, and think they have enough; a cheap Christianity which offends nobody, and requires no sacrifice-- which costs nothing, and is worth nothing.

This departure from the core tenets of Christianity leads us to the latest controversy regarding Stanley. I'll sample some of the the quotes from the scattered, confusing, and vague sermon he gave about LGBTQ participation in the church. His church does not have a statement regarding marriage and sex, although he has said that those seeking leadership in the church must affirm that they are not pursuing a homosexual relationship. To be clear, Stanley has not flat out admitted to being LGBTQ-affirming, but the language used below is telling at worst and unhelpful at best:

"If I could figure out how to get straight people as excited about serving or engaging as the gay men and women I know, we would have a volunteer backlog."

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“A gay person who still wants to attend church after the way the church has treated them . . . I’m telling you . . . they have more faith than I do. . . . They still love God.”

“I know the “clobber passages,” alright? We’ve got to figure this out. And if you don’t . . . you can say goodbye to the next generation.”

“Pastors who declare they are affirming or not affirming are taking the church away from someone unnecessarily.”

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These are definitely not representations of the orthodox Christian position on sexuality and marriage. Giving charity for context, it is still hard to see how this fits in with the Biblical testimony on the sinfulness of homosexual behavior. It is my hope and prayer that Andy was just being vague, or that He miscommunicated by mistake. Either way, with a topic of this level of importance, dropping the ball here really hurts. He even references “clobber passages”, or the passages that reference Gods judgement on homosexual behavior. Calling them “clobber passages”, rather than “the inspired and inerrant Word of God” sounds like one step away from a denial of the truth in those passages.

Statements like these are alarming, but it’s easy to see how a vague commitment to “reaching people” and an uneasiness with controversy can lead a pastor down this path. But is this how the church should speak about homosexuality? Is this helpful, or does it just appease people for a season while beating around the bush on a topic of eternal importance?

Truth in Love

When we downplay the significance of sin, or refer to the passages that warn against it as “clobber passages”, we endanger people with a false sense of security. The Bible speaks boldly about a multitude of sins, and you never find Paul, or Jesus, or the Prophets beating around the bush for the sake of “reaching people”. Now, not every sin needs to be addressed every time we speak to people, but when the topic comes up, the Biblical writers are not afraid to speak truth:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” -1 Corinthians 6:9-10

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“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” -Matthew 5:22

We have been told that this kind of speech is unloving, and to be sure, there is a way to speak truth in an unloving manner, which is why the Bible stresses for us to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). However, it is unloving to look someone in the eyes, smile, and allow them to think that they are perfectly safe when they are not. The Bible says that when we turn a sinner away from their sin we “save his soul from death” (James 5:20). In order to do this, we must be honest about sin.

I do appreciate that Stanley uses the word “clobber”, although I don’t like the context. There is a way that Christians can use the Bible to beat people up. Quoting the passages above, without bringing people to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the merciful rescue of God, leads to hopelessness. The primary way that we speak the truth in love is to follow our conversation about sin with a conversation about the love and grace of God toward sinners.

The love of God is available to sinners who do not deserve it. This is a beautiful reality of the gospel that must be communicated. But we cannot, in the name of love, leave out another key component to the gospel; repentance and faith. To come to Jesus, you must forsake everything else that you cling to (Luke 14:26-33). Turning to Christ means that you are turning away from something, this is the heart of repentance. It is a turning away from your former ways of living in order to turn to the one who can give you a new life altogether (Acts 3:19, Matthew 3:8, 2 Peter 3:9, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Hatefulness of Tolerance

At the root of this mass-capitulation is a lie that we have been sold. This is the lie of *tolerance*. In our culture, every behavior is permissible, except for the cardinal sin of intolerance. The highest virtue of our secular age is to be accepting and affirming of all beliefs and lifestyles.

With all of the talk of love in the Bible, it is easy to assume that tolerance is taught in Scripture also. Well, it is true that tolerance is found in the Bible, but not in the way that we assume. The word “tolerate” is only used four times in Bible, and never in a positive light. One striking use comes in a rebuke from Jesus to the church at Thyatira:

*“But I have this against you, that you **tolerate** that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” (Revelation 2:20)*

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Jesus rebukes the church for the very same thing that we worship in our culture; tolerance. They tolerated, were content with, did not speak against, or even stood with those whose words were contrary to Christ's. They had tried to ride the line. They had tried to align with Jesus *and* with the world. With Jesus, however, there is no middle ground. There is no neutrality with the Lord of Lords. If we are not with Him, we are against Him (Matthew 12:30).

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Tolerance of sin isn't just an affront to the Lordship of Christ, it is also a cruel and hateful act against our fellow man. Good parents know this to be true; tolerating that which is harmful to our children is dangerous for them. This is why we do not let our toddlers eat only junk food, or stay up all night, or play in the highway. It is, by definition, *unloving* to affirm or turn a blind eye to that which is surely devastating to another person. This is why Christians cannot tolerate or affirm homosexual behavior. To do so, according to Scripture, would be to allow someone to celebrate an action that leads to judgement and destruction (Romans 1:27).

Christians desperately need to recapture a Biblical definition of love. Pastors especially need to learn the essence of true love. We need to love the way that God loves, not affirming the sin, but rescuing the sinner. God's love is perfect and inexhaustible, and yet it is never devoid of truth. Rather, His love is always true love, in that it is based upon truth. To love someone is to pursue the absolute best for them. This is what God has done for us in Christ, He has pursued our best at great personal cost to Himself. This kind of love is why God promises to take us as we are, but it also why He refuses to leave us as we are. He is committed to our transformation, because He knows that our sin is destructive to us. He wants what is best, which is why His salvation is always followed by His command for us to change.

Speaking to the LGBTQ Community

If you are homosexual and are reading this, I have a message for you: I love you. God loves you. God wants what is best for you, and I do too. However, it is often the case that we do not know what is best for us. It is very often the case that what feels good is not what is best at all. I do not speak against your attractions because I hate you, but because I genuinely believe that God has designed more for you than temporary pleasure that leads to ultimate ruin.

I'm not telling you that you are going to hell merely because you are homosexual. I'm saying that hell awaits you because you are a sinner who lives contrary to the commands of God. But you are not alone in this, and I am no better than you. I too stood under the wrath of God for my own sins, and although they are different than yours, my condemnation was the same. But Christ called me to come to Him and receive His mercy.

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This coming to Him by faith required that I repent, that I abandon all of my self-ruled notions and ideas. It required that I admit that He knows best, whatever the cost.

The love, connection, joy, and fulfillment that you are seeking can only be found in the God who made you and knows you. He waits with open arms to give you life; a more abundant life than you ever imagined. It is not a life of affirmation, where He always tells you that you are right. But it is a life of freedom, where God Himself leads you into truth, love, and righteousness. I long for you to experience union with God, and to see the fullness of that union for all of eternity. I implore you to turn to Christ and be reconciled to God, adopted by Him as His child. True life awaits you in Christ, and I pray that you find it.



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