

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

No, Andy Stanley, Christianity Without Repentance Is Not Drawing a Circle, It is Erasing Truth

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It has been about six years since I have written anything about Andy Stanley. Previously, I was concerned about his significant voice and following in evangelical and Southern Baptist circles. At the same time, it seemed he was moving toward views that aligned more with theological liberalism.

- ✎ [At a Southern Baptist Pastors Conference, Stanley said we should not pray for revival.](#)
- ✎ [Stanley argued preachers should stop saying, “The Bible says”.](#)
- ✎ [Stanley argued that Christians should unhitch the Bible from the Old Testament.](#)
- ✎ [Recently, Stanley has contended that the Ten Commandments do not apply to Christians.](#)

I haven't written anything about his views since he unhitched the Bible from the Old Testament comments because it seemed he had moved outside of evangelicalism and Southern Baptist life and thought. I generally reserve my written critiques for those within my theological orbit who might influence, from a distance, the people I pastor.

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I had no intention of writing anything about the Unconditional Conference being hosted by his church, North Point. The conference was billed as:



The Unconditional Conference is a premier event for Christian parents with LGBTQ+ children, ministry leaders, and counselors. In a world that makes us choose sides, you will experience a conference from the quieter middle space. You'll enjoy community with hundreds of other Christians on similar journeys and be informed, nourished, refreshed, and discover newfound purpose you once may have thought impossible.

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<https://www.embracingthejourney.org/faqs.html>

Among the speakers, who all seem to advocate for the full acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity as compatible with Christian faith and practice, were Justin Lee and Brian Nietzel, who are in a same-sex marriage.

Andy Stanley explains why they were invited speakers at the conference,

This is why Justin and Brian were invited, the two married gay men at the center of all the controversy. And I'm sure that you've read all about that. And here's the thing about Brian and Justin: their stories and their journeys of growing up in church and maintaining their faith in Christ and their commitment to follow Christ all through their high school and college and singles and all up to the time that they were married, their story is so powerful for parents of gay especially kids, that it's a story gay parents and gay kids need to hear."

Clearly, Stanley himself believes that unrepentant practicing homosexuals can be described, without question, as Christians who are "maintaining their faith" and faithfully following Christ, so much so that they are reliable guides to Christians about how to respond to LGBTQ+ issues. Okay, that is precisely the trajectory I have been convinced Stanley is on for years now. There is no reason to write about what is obvious and what is now open for all to see.

But what else Stanley said in response to those critical of the conference caused me to turn on the computer and comment. Stanley said, "Every instruction in the Bible regarding marriage references or assumes a husband and a wife, a man or a woman. So biblical marriage, biblical marriage is between a man and a woman. We've never shied

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away from that.” The only way these two assertions can be reconciled is if you embrace a notion of Christianity where faith is severed from repentance. In other words, it is a gospel where repentance is optional. Sadly, such a gospel is no gospel at all.

Stanley asserts that he has spent time with gay Christians who tearfully assert their desire to have a biblical family, some of whom embrace a life of celibacy. But he says, for others,

that is not sustainable. So they choose a same-sex marriage. Not because they're convinced it's biblical," but because they "chose to marry for the same reason many of us do. Love, companionship, and family. And in the end, as was the case for all of us, this is the important thing I want you to hear me say—it's their decision."

He states emphatically, “Our decision is to decide how we respond to their decision.” On this point, Stanley and I are in complete agreement. He explains at North Point, “Our decision ... we decided 28 years ago: we draw circles; we don't draw lines—we draw big circles.” No, offering a Christianity where repentance is optional is not drawing circles but erasing lines of biblical truth. Lines drawn by Jesus who said, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish” ([Luke 13:3,5](#)).

Hendrikus Berkhof rightly said, “Without repentance all the notes of the Christian faith are off-key and fall silent. Then the gospel is changed from a marvelous message of liberation into a more or less self-evident ideology of cheap grace.” (*Christian Faith*, p. 429). Salvation is salvation from sin, and there is no salvation for those who refuse to trust Christ and repent ([Rom 6:1-4](#), [1 John 3:9](#)). It is gloriously true that justification is by faith alone. Still, where there is a turning to Christ in faith, there is a turning from sin in repentance. This is the gospel message of Jesus, the apostles, and the whole of Scripture.

J. Gresham Machen described this notion of a gospel without repentance one hundred years ago in *Christianity and Liberalism*,

*The fundamental fault of the modern Church is that she is busily engaged in an absolutely impossible task—she is busily engaged in calling the righteous to repentance. Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: “You people are very good,” he says; “you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible—especially in the life of Jesus—something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people.” Such is modern preaching. It is heard every Sunday in thousands of pulpits. But it is entirely futile. Even our Lord did not call the righteous to repentance, and probably we shall be no more successful than He. (*Christianity and Liberalism*, 58).*

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Andy Stanley also suggests that the Unconditional Conference was pastoral, not theological. One wonders how Stanley defines pastoral and how he defines theology. The most basic definition of theology is a study of God's revelation of Himself. Our authoritative revelation of God is found in the Scripture, so I affirm John Frame's definition, "Theology is the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life." (*Systematic Theology*, 5). It is my understanding that at the Unconditional Conference, the focus was on God, Scripture, the church, and the identity of God's image bearers. That is theology.

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One sad part of all of this is that we do need conferences to equip churches and Christians on how to respond to LGBTQ+ in a compassionate and biblically faithful way. We need, and must, speak truth in love to this issue. Andy Stanley's conference promised a conference that would speak "from the quieter middle space" where you do not have to choose sides. He provided old liberalism in newer, cooler clothes and sneakers. The truth is, you always have to choose sides. After all, Jesus is Lord. Erasing sin is the opposite of pastoral, and it is definitely theology, just not the theology of the Bible.



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