

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Train is Leaving the Station

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*Andy Stanley's Departure from Biblical Christianity*

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Andy Stanley, Wikimedia Commons

It's not like we have not seen this coming. In the coming days, Andy Stanley is set to host the "Unconditional Conference" at a campus of North Point Community Church in the metro Atlanta area, and the website for the conference bills it as a "two-day premier event" especially designed for parents of LGBTQ+ children and ministry leaders. "You will be equipped, refreshed, and inspired as you hear from leading communicators on topics that speak to your heart, soul, and mind," it promises. One statement stands out in the description: "No matter what theological stance you hold, we invite you to listen, reflect, and learn as we approach this topic from the quieter middle space."

The promise of "the quieter middle space" might appear attractive, given the volatility of cultural discourse on LGBTQ+ issues, and a conference designed to help parents of LGBTQ+ children and ministry leaders work through these issues in clearly Biblical terms would be a welcome development. But the advertising for the Unconditional Conference indicates clearly that this event is designed as a platform for normalizing the LGBTQ+ revolution while claiming that the conference represents "the quieter middle space." In truth, there is no "middle space" on these issues, and it is no longer plausible to claim that such middle space exists.

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Scheduled speakers for the event include two men who are married to other men, at least according to current civil law. Biographical background on speakers Justin Lee and Brian Nietzel indicates that both men are in what are now described as “same-sex marriages.” Lee is well known as a platform speaker who argues for the legitimacy of “monogamous same-sex relationships.” Nietzel presents seminars on “restoring LGBTQ+ faith.” Just to be clear: This is not “the quieter middle space.”

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Another major speaker is David Gushee, a prominent intellectual who has been honest about his own change of mind on the moral status of LGBTQ+ behaviors and relationships. In the “definitive edition” of his book *Changing Our Mind*, subtitled as a “Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBT Christians,” he traces his own pilgrimage to eager LGBTQ+ advocacy. In the book, Gushee states that he will “grant the historical claim that the Church has believed that same-sex acts and relationships are always wrong.” But the book traces his change, over time, to a position in which he clearly asserts that the Christian church has been historically wrong on this issue. In his book and in other presentations, Gushee is clear about his position, his reasoning, his reading of the Bible, and his conclusions.

I appreciate his honesty and the clarity with which he makes his argument. Furthermore, I am pretty confident that Gushee would agree that the issues at stake in this debate reflect the deepest issues of conviction and our understanding of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and how we read the Bible. What we face here is an honest disagreement over fundamental convictions. As Gushee writes, “I am instead asking whether devout gay and lesbian Christians might be able to participate in the covenantal-marital sexual ethical standard—one person, for life, faithful and exclusive, in a loving nonexploitative, non-coercive, reciprocal relationship, that is the highest expression of Christian sexual ethics—which, in fact, a goodly number are already doing. I can’t find a compelling reason to say no anymore.”

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*Andy Stanley, one of the most influential pastors in the United States, has been moving in this direction for years, often by suggestion and assertion but clouded by confusion and the deliberate avoidance of clarity.*

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That is about as clear a statement as we might imagine. It is absolutely free from evasion or confusion. Add to that declaration the fact that the Unconditional Conference will include two men married to other men as speakers or presenters. None of this is hidden,

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but it is falsely presented as “the quieter middle space.” But, as Gushee has acknowledged (and lamented), the Christian church has clearly and consistently (and until recently, virtually unanimously) understood the Bible to forbid all same-sex sexual behaviors and to authorize sexual expression only within marriage as the covenant union of a man and a woman.

This conference is not really “quiet,” nor is it “middle space.” It is structured as what most evangelicals would quickly recognize as a departure from historic normative Biblical Christianity.

Andy Stanley, one of the most influential pastors in the United States, has been moving in this direction for years, often by suggestion and assertion but clouded by confusion and the deliberate avoidance of clarity. Back in 2018, he called for the church to be “unhitched” from the Old Testament, arguing that the Old Testament should not be understood as the “go-to source regarding any behavior in the church.” There goes “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). But, in truth, there goes the entire Old Testament. A few years before that, in a 2012 message Stanley seemed to argue that adultery is a sin but told of two men in a relationship with no suggestion that the same-sex coupling was forbidden by Scripture. When the message became controversial, Stanley did not clarify the situation at all. More recently, in another message Stanley dismissed Biblical texts against homosexual behavior as “clobber” verses and said, “If your theology gets in the way of ministry—like if there’s somebody you can’t minister to because of your theology—you have the wrong theology.”

This is not a misunderstanding. This is a trajectory that points to the Unconditional Conference and two speakers married to other men on the platform. This is a clear and tragic departure from Biblical Christianity.

The conference has not been held yet. No doubt there will be a good deal of conversation once it has been held. Maybe the conference will surprise us and Stanley will present a resounding affirmation of Biblical authority and the Christian church’s longstanding convictions concerning sexuality, marriage, and gender. But that would require a reversal of Stanley’s trajectory and a bold correction of his platform guests. To state the obvious—that is not what is advertised. He has been working in this direction for years now. Sadly, it looks like the train is about to leave the station.

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