

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Andy Stanley's Statements about the Bible are not Cutting Edge—They're Old Liberalism

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I was at the recent ERLC Onward Conference listening when Russell Moore was having a conversation about ministry and preaching with Andy Stanley. I was startled when Stanley said he preaches some sermons without ever quoting the Bible. He views these *sermons* as extended introductions. Stanley also said we do not believe Christianity because of the Bible, but because of the resurrection and eyewitness testimonies. A couple of years ago, Stanley said that preachers should stop saying, "The Bible says," a position he reaffirmed during the conversation ([Link](#)).

I have criticized some of Stanley's position in the past but I've also long admired many things about Andy Stanley's ministry. I was trying to give him a generous hearing, perhaps I thought, I just wasn't getting what he was saying. But after listening to his recent "The Bible told me so," sermon, I realized I had understood him after all. He began his sermon by quoting the beloved song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," and contends, "This is where our problem began" ([Link](#)). Stanley says the song is fine for children but not appropriate for adults. He believes we have been naively taught, "The Bible says it, that settles it" and that kind of simplistic reasoning is why many walk away from the faith as adults.

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According to Stanley, defending the Bible in its entirety as completely true, is too great a burden, and wrongly puts the Bible at the center of the debate. He speaks as if his view is a cutting edge apologetic position for our time or an innovative evangelistic strategy, but what he is advocating has historically had a name—liberalism. His father, Charles Stanley, and many other evangelicals spent a bulk of their ministry winning, what was often called, the battle for the Bible. Theological liberals said the Bible is true in its primary theological message but not in all of its parts. They believed those contending for biblical inerrancy were guilty of bibliolatry. I think it was Paige Patterson, who called the kind of position Stanley now advocates, spot inerrancy. It was the notion that the Bible was inspired in spots and they considered themselves inspired to spot the spots.

Theological liberals have always attempted to liberate Jesus from the Scriptures. Stanley argues that our faith is based on the resurrection and not the Bible. Severing the Scriptures from the resurrection is the very thing that Jesus said could not be done, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” ([Luke 16:31](#)).

Paul told Timothy, “the sacred writings” are “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” ([2 Tim 3:15](#)). When Paul devoted an entire chapter to the resurrection, he began by clarifying that it was “in accordance with the Scriptures.”

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (emphasis added, [1 Cor 15:3-4](#)).

J. Gresham Machen explained in his classic *Christianity and Liberalism*, “My Christian life, then, depends altogether upon the truth of the New Testament record. Christian experience is rightly used when it confirms the documentary evidence. But it can never possibly provide a substitute for the documentary evidence” (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, New edition, 2009: 61).

The Christian message has come to us through the Bible. The biblical witness authoritatively judges the validity of our Christian thoughts and experience and never the other way around.

Any attempt to pit the acts, teaching, and ethics of Jesus, against the rest of Scripture is a repudiation of what Jesus taught and the Bible’s own self-attestation ([Matt 5:17-20](#), [26:54](#), [Luke 24:24-49](#), [John 10:35](#), [2 Tim 3:16](#), [2 Pet 1:21](#)). The words of the prophets pointed beyond themselves to the coming Messiah, and the words of Jesus recorded in the Scripture (by apostles), pointed forward to the further revelation of Christ to come in the apostolic witness. Jesus taught the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture: “The

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Scripture cannot be broken” ([John 10:35](#)). Liberalism sets Scripture against Scripture but faithful Christianity does not.

In his sermon, Stanley says, “Christianity does not exist because of the Bible any more than you exist because of your birth certificate. Your birth certificate documents something that happened.” Again, this logic minimizes the uniqueness of the Word of God and is right out of the classic theological liberal playbook. Liberals have historically asserted, “The Bible is not the Word of God, it is merely a witness to the Word of God.” To the contrary, as B.B. Warfield argued, the Bible to be “a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God” (*Works*, 1:52). In an 1899 article, “It says: Scripture says: God says,” Warfield notes how the biblical writers show an absolute identification “of Scripture with the speaking God” (*Works*, 1:284). The biblical testimony assumes the absolute identification of “the Scripture with the living voice of God” (*Works*, 1:283). Machen rightly asserted, “

Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life” (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, New edition, 2009: 67).

At the close of his sermon, Stanley thundered, “The first, second, and third century Christians, who faced tremendous hardship, believed Jesus loved them *before* the Bible told them so.” He added, “The pre-Bible version of the faith was defensible.” According to Stanley, grown up faith is not dependent on the complete truthfulness of the biblical witness. Stanley argues as if there was no recognized Scripture, or representative biblical canon, prior to the historical closing of the canon, which is simply not true ([2 Tim 3:14-4:2](#)). Stanley’s views represent a functional rejection of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, when it asserts, “By authenticating each other’s authority, Christ and the Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority.” I am not saying Andy Stanley is a theological liberal but I am saying he is using the same arguments as theological liberals.

In Jesus’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man protests that the Scriptures are not enough and definitive proof like a resurrection is needed ([Luke 16:30](#)). Abraham refutes that logic. Commenting on this passage, Walter Elwell explains, “Those who do not put credence in the Scriptures will not be persuaded by a resurrection.... No miracle can convince anyone of the credibility of the kingdom message. The Scriptures are sufficient for salvation, and those who reject their message will rationalize miraculous phenomena as well” (*Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, [Luke 16:31](#), Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995). Another way to explain it would simply be, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

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