

How Andy Stanley Is Distorting the Christian View of Sexuality

Last week I hosted a men's discipleship conference in Jacksonville, Florida. More than 220 guys from 18 states and a few foreign countries enjoyed three days of meals, fellowship and encouraging sermons. The guys sang loudly and got rowdy during break times, but you could hear a pin drop during a panel discussion about sexual purity on Friday night.

The first guy on the panel told how his wife caught him looking at pornography—and how the exposure led to his freedom from sex addiction. Another guy got transparent about his ongoing battle with porn and how he found fresh grace to resist the temptation.

Another man shared how childhood bullying and a distant father led to same-sex attraction; yet because of his Christian faith, he found the power to resist those feelings, got married and had kids. A fourth guy told how he lived in a gay relationship until he found Jesus and married his wife.

It was refreshing to hear these men talk openly about their struggles. Nobody judged the two guys who were honest about homosexuality; they weren't labeled or put down. Everybody knows same-sex attraction is just one of many ways men today struggle in their sexuality.

Later in the evening, after a clear and compassionate message on sexual purity from speaker Eddie Taylor, guys streamed to the altar for prayer. They wanted freedom from many different things—porn addictions, the shame of adultery, memories of sexual abuse, homosexual lust, deliverance from fornication and other sins. Spiritual chains were shattered because the men repented and asked Jesus for forgiveness and healing.

Meanwhile, another Christian conference was happening just a few hours north of Jacksonville that same weekend. Andy Stanley's controversial "Unconditional" event was held at the 38,000-member North Point Community Church in Atlanta. According to its organizers, that event was designed "for parents of LGBTQ+ children and for ministry leaders looking to discover ways to support parents and LGBTQ+ children in their churches."

Parents of LGBTQ kids certainly need support, as do their kids. But instead of offering clear biblical guidelines, Stanley confused everybody by blurring lines and sending mixed messages. While on one hand he maintained that his church affirms biblical marriage between one woman and one man, he invited two controversial authors to speak. Justin Lee and Brian Nietzel are both married to men, and they both teach that God sanctions gay relationships.

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Why did Stanley ask these two men to stand in his church's pulpit if he believes the Bible doesn't condone homosexuality? North Point announced that the Unconditional conference was seeking to find a "quieter middle space" on the controversial topic of gay sex, and Stanley described Lee and Nietzel as "Christ followers."

Christian leaders from many denominations quickly criticized Stanley for talking out of both sides of his mouth.

- Derek Paul, director of Transformation Ministries International, an organization that provides counseling and support to people leaving the gay lifestyle, described the Unconditional conference as "a perversion of the gospel itself and a mockery of the created order."

- Sam Allberry, a Nashville-based pastor and author of the book "Is God Anti-Gay?," wrote in Christianity Today last week: "To say or even imply that it is possible to persist in this sin [of homosexuality] is nothing short of sending people to hell—and a profound failure of pastoral responsibility."
- Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Seminary, chastised Stanley for suggesting that Christians shouldn't draw strict moral lines when it comes to sexuality. "Christ also drew lines with clarity, such as the line separating the sheep from the goats," Mohler said. "Similarly, the apostles preached the great Good News of the gospel, yet also called Christians to holy living and to avoid sexual immorality."

This certainly isn't the first time a so-called Christian leader has compromised the message of the Bible in order to appeal to our permissive culture. This has become the norm in many churches. But what is dangerous about Andy Stanley's new stance is that he is one of the most visible evangelical leaders in America—and his church is based in the heart of the Bible Belt.

The apostle Paul understood that ministers of the gospel have been given a sacred trust. We don't have permission to bend or change the Bible to fit our opinions, or to reshape Christian truth into a golden calf that appeals to the crowd. Paul told his successor Timothy: "Preach the word ... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate teachers in accordance to their own desires" (2 Tim. 4:2-3).

If we really love today's kids, we won't confuse them; we will tell them the honest truth without compromising, back-pedaling or sugarcoating. I pray Andy Stanley will go back and listen

to the rock solid teachings of his father, Charles Stanley, who held fast to the pure gospel until he died in April at age 90. And I pray Andy will renounce his squishy message of relativism, because it could deceive a generation. {eo}

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