

My Dialogue With Andy Stanley

Earlier this week, after some gay websites were celebrating comments made last month by Pastor Andy Stanley, I wrote the article, "Andy Stanley Was Really Right and Really Wrong," sending it to Pastor Stanley via Twitter. He got back to me immediately and opened the door to some very fruitful dialogue.

While I understand this is the first time we've interacted and that, for the moment, there are probably more questions we have for each other than answers, with his permission and blessing, I'm sharing some of our interaction here, believing it will bring more light than heat.

Pastor Stanley asked me to listen to his entire leadership message from April to give context to the quotes I cited in my article. Normally, I can't listen to every message from which quotes are taken (any more than I can read in entirety every book from which quotes are taken), but given the importance of these issues, I did listen in full, agreeing with so much of what he said.

What I realized, though, was that some of the most damning quotes I had read did not come from this particular message.

He explained to me that, "Some of the comments you quoted were in fact not from this message. But you took your cue from what others said which misrepresented me. They combined unrelated comments and made it sound as if they had a single source from a single time frame."

So, while these gay websites quoted him accurately, by putting all the quotes together in one article, they presented a misleading picture of his April leadership message.

I regret that I also put the quotes together in the same context and apologize for the oversight. At the same time, as

Pastor Stanley knows, the quotes themselves do concern me.

In his message, he mentioned that our churches should be the safest place on the planet for gay teens. I asked him specifically, "You're talking about church kids with unwanted same-sex attraction, NOT kids freely practicing homosexuality, correct?"

He responded, "Correct. I've never met a teen who didn't pray for change. Bishop Robinson admitted as much about himself as a seminary student. The unanswered prayer approach to this is important for church leaders."

He continued, "We teach teenagers to honor God with their bodies and to never sexualize a relationship. 'Sexualize' is stronger and broader than don't have sex."

So far, so good. I had asked for clarification in my article and was glad to get it.

I asked him, "When you say there's no consensus in the room [of leaders at the April conference] re: homosexuality and same-sex 'marriage,' you mean, 'There's disagreement here, but we need to get back to the Word, which clearly forbids homosexual practice and does not recognize same-sex 'marriage,' correct? (I'm not trying to put words in your mouth; I'm trying to understand your position that you want me to correct.)"

He replied, "I just mean there is not consensus on the broader topic but certainly there should be consensus around a commitment not to run another generation of same-sex attracted kids out of Church. Everybody should agree on that."

While I absolutely applaud his sentiments in terms of reaching out to these young people with real compassion and sensitivity, I don't believe we can do that effectively without first agreeing on what the Bible teaches on the subject. Otherwise, if we affirm these kids in their

homosexual desires (even to the point of saying that those feelings are a gift from God) or if we give them hope that they can “marry” a same-sex partner, we do them far more harm than good.

Love tells the truth, and we can be there for them and show them the love of God in tangible ways without misleading them.

To repeat: While it is good to call the church to sensitivity so as not to drive these precious young people away, it is imperative that we call church leaders to do so based on the clear teaching of Scripture on sexuality and marriage. And surely these kids want to know what we believe about these critically important issues in their lives.

When I asked Pastor Stanley for further clarity on his call for us to take one year off from the culture wars, he explained, “70% of Americans claim to be some kind of Christian. If we hit pause on the culture war for one year and 100% of believers embraced my list [of sins we should abstain from and of good works we should do] the nation would change without the culture war.

“I was making a point about our responsibility as Christians not culture war per se. The culture war is necessary because the church has failed. I’m grateful for many/most of the men and women who work tirelessly to keep public ‘servants’ accountable. I love Russell Moore.”

Once more, I’m with him 100 percent in calling for believers to live like believers, confident that if we do, the nation will be changed, and I’m pleased to know that he does support some of those on the front lines of the culture wars. But I’m sure we can focus on living like believers without taking any break from the culture wars. Why must it be one or the other? For me, they go completely hand in hand.

Regarding his comments on gay relationships relative to his recently released book on relationships, he told me that the

comments were made more than four years ago in a different context and were wrongly linked to his current book.

While he understood how the matters could be confused, he felt it was important I understood the different contexts. I still do have serious questions about those earlier comments, but that's as far as we were able to get in our initial interaction, which I still do appreciate.

My thought on the matter is this: In my view, any solid evangelical teacher or preacher should be able to say without hesitation, "God's Word clearly forbids all homosexual practice, even in a loving, monogamous context, but our church is absolutely committed to loving and serving the LGBT community and offering them a place they can call home as they come to know the Lord."

What stops Pastor Stanley from making this statement? I hope to find out soon.

Better still, I hope to hear him make this statement.

Having said that, I appreciate Pastor Stanley reaching out to me and taking the time to interact, I was blessed to hear some of his clarifications, and again, I apologize for grouping disparate quotes together in one context.

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