

Pastor Andy Stanley Affirms Biblical Marriage After 'Controversial' Conference

Following a whirlwind of controversy, speculation, support and accusations, Pastor Andy Stanley disclosed his stance on gay marriage to his congregation on Sunday, Oct. 1.

Stanley, pastor at the Atlanta-area megachurch, North Point Community Church, addressed the swirling rumors and assumptions that were being made in an untelevised sermon meant just for his church.

This is following a highly contentious and sensitive two-day seminar Stanley hosted for parents of LGBTQ children called the "Unconditional Conference."

There was an announcement sent out prior to the service on Sunday detailing what the sermon would be about:

"HEY EVERYBODY, You may have heard about or been asked about a conference for parents North Point Community Church is hosting on September 28-29, the Unconditional Conference. A great deal of misinformation has circulated regarding the purpose of the conference, and I do not want you to be misinformed. So on Sunday, October 1, we're taking a break from our regular programming to talk about the conference and why we elected to host it. In light of the subject matter, we will not be streaming services online on October 1. If you plan to attend, and I hope you will, plan to arrive early. While the subject matter will not be kid-friendly, this is actually the perfect weekend to bring your kids because we are kicking off new content in all our children's environments. If you have no idea what all the fuss is about, good! Come anyway and I'll explain."

Before the event, Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, voiced his criticism of Stanley on his podcast "The Briefing," asserting that the concept of "the quieter middle space" is deceptive.

"I don't believe that the quieter middle space exists," Mohler said. "I can see why many might hope that it would exist. You might hope there would be a place which is not so confrontational, not so controversial, not so loud."

Mohler continued, highlighting that two of the speakers scheduled to address the conference were in fact homosexual men who were married to other men.

"Let's just be clear: This isn't middle space," Mohler said. "This is declaring sides, and this is not the side consistent with biblical Christianity. This is the side that I believe is not only incompatible with biblical Christianity but cannot coexist in one space with biblical Christianity."

This decision has led to both support and condemnation by the Christian church. Some are supportive of Stanley's outreach efforts to the LGBTQ community and believe what he is doing is what Christians are called to do.

Others however believe this is an acceptance of LGBTQ lifestyle without the transformative process that comes from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some even claim now that Stanley has gone full apostate.

exactly did Stanley say to address this quagmire of theology, opinion, support, condemnation, accusation and more?

Protestia was among the first outlets to post the unedited audio of Stanley's message on their website and social media accounts. The audio shows Stanley highlighted three statements on "New Testament Sexual Ethics":

- **Honor God with your body.** The Holy Spirit lives in you

and your body is how people know what you believe and where you stand; your behavior through your body is to exemplify the goodness of God and the grace of God and the love of God. So, you always honor God with your body and you always honor others as well.

- **Don't be mastered by anything.** Not by porn, not by sexual addiction. Don't be mastered by another person. Don't be mastered by infatuation. Don't be mastered by lust. Don't be mastered by anything. You have a master and He's the king. And He loves you and He created you and He knows what's best for you.
- **Don't sexualize a relationship outside of marriage.** "That is so old fashioned! No sex before we're married? If you're not married, I mean who even teaches that anymore?' Always have, always will... we're not going to blink on this," Stanley says.

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Stanley continued and directly addressed his, and by extension his church's, view on sexual activity from a marriage and biblical stance:

"Sex is for married people. Regarding marriage, and this feels weird [to] even say this, just [to] make sure everybody knows where we are. We talk about marriage, or we talk about and teach about marriage the same way Jesus and the apostles did. 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 away from that. We don't change the words in order not to offend people," Stanley says.

In the sermon, Stanley continues addressing the area that many have taken issue with: responding to homosexual marriages by

loving them and restoring relationships with them since they have decided they are incapable of living chaste lives.

“But for many, that is not sustainable. So they choose a same-sex marriage. Not because they’re convinced it’s biblical—they read the same Bible we do—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,” says Stanley.

This has been viewed by many as an acceptance of the lifestyle and practices of homosexuality without addressing the transformative nature that accompanies the act of making Jesus Lord and Savior over one’s life.

Andrew T. Walker, an Ethics and Public Theology Professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, summed up Stanley’s stance as a “distinction between doctrine and pastoral practice.

“What does that mean? It means the doctrine has not ‘officially’ changed which is why he can technically affirm a ‘biblical view,’ but for all practical purposes, there is a pastoral accommodation that allows for LGBTQ-identified persons to disobey Scripture and remain in good standing as a Christian.”

I was able to listen to Andy Stanley’s messages from today on the topic of same-sex attraction and marriage.

What’s clear from Stanley’s teaching is that he’s drawing a distinction between doctrine and pastoral practice. What does that mean? It means the doctrine has not...

– Andrew T. Walker (@andrewtwalk) October 2, 2023

In taking the stance of respectful disagreement, Walker leaned on his own personal experiences with Stanley and attempted to

offer correction in a loving, Christian manner:

“Andy Stanley is an acquaintance I’ve spoken with about these issues over the past several years. He’s never been anything less than kind and respectful, so I have no personal animosity in saying this; in fact, I say it with much grief and lament: Andy Stanley is in error, and based on reports I’ve heard of what’s encouraged and promoted at North Point itself through its counseling ministries, the church is leading people down a grave pathway that is unbiblical and therefore harmful to those it claims to serve.”

Maybe with more loving, respectful and, most importantly, Scripturally based discussions, Christian leaders can address the growing need for families dealing with LGBTQ members and their path forward in the living Word of God.

Perhaps Pastor Jimmy Evans said it best this past Sunday, “When a person is sexually confused they deserve compassion, and they deserve to be treated for the problems and the spiritual problems they are going through.” {eo}

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