

Yes, Pastor Stanley, Let's Preach the Sermon on the Mount

Once again, Pastor Andy Stanley has sparked a major controversy in the church by writing that, "The Ten Commandments are from the Old Covenant" and do not "apply" to Christians today. He therefore takes issue with Christians erecting monuments of the Ten Commandments and asks, "But how many times have you seen Christians trying to post the text of the Sermon on the Mount in a public place?"

To be sure, the Ten Commandments are a lot shorter than the Sermon on the Mount, so it's a lot easier to erect a monument containing the text of the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:1-13) than it is to erect a monument containing three full chapters of the words of Jesus (see Matt. 5-7).

But what about the larger point he is making?

First, I understand why there has been such outrage and why so many articles are accusing Pastor Stanley of heresy.

Second, I fundamentally reject Pastor Stanley's assertion that, when Jesus issued the new commandment that we love one another as He loved us (John 13:34), that Jesus "issued his new commandment as a replacement for everything in the existing list. Including the big 10. Just as his New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, Jesus' new commandment replaced all the old commandments."

Third, last year, I took strong issue with Pastor Stanley's statement that Christians should "unhitch" themselves from the Old Testament, leading to a productive interview with him on the "Line of Fire" radio show.

All that being said, Pastor Stanley is incredibly accessible (especially in light of the massive influence he wields), extremely gracious and humble, and quite willing to interact. I promised him that I would read his *Irresistible* book before making more detailed comments, and I have already sent him this article before posting.

For the moment, then, I want to emphasize a point of strong agreement between us: The Sermon on the Mount applies to Christians! Let us teach it and preach it and live it with renewed vigor.

Sadly, there are pastors and leaders who tell us that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to Christians today. They make the very dangerous and totally wrong claim that all of the teachings of Jesus before the cross apply only to Jesus' Jewish audience at that time. God forbid!

These words of Jesus are for us, His disciples (see Matt. 5:1-16). They are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). They are to remain in our hearts (John 15:7). They are essential for being disciples and making disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). They will outlast the heavens and the earth (Matt. 24:35).

I dealt with this serious error of dismissing the words of Jesus in my book *Hyper-Grace*, and I strongly encourage readers who are confused about this issue to review the material there carefully.

But, to return to my agreement with Pastor Stanley, yes, let us preach and teach the Sermon on the Mount.

Let us reiterate that we are truly blessed when we are poor in spirit, mourning with the mourners, full of mercy, pure in heart, peacemakers, those who stand for righteousness and are persecuted for righteousness.

Let us emphasize our calling to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Let us remind ourselves that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the prophets but to fulfill, and that our righteousness must exceed that of the zealous religious leaders of the day.

Let us teach that we are liable to severe judgment if we hate and disparage others. That to look at another person with lustful intent is to commit adultery in the heart. That we should deal radically with anything that leads us into sin. That divorce can only be allowed under strict circumstances.

Let us preach clearly that our words must mean what they say. That we must not have a retaliatory spirit but rather must overcome evil with good. That we must love those who hate us. That our goal is to emulate the perfection of our heavenly Father.

Let us learn to practice our piety in private—our giving and our praying and our fasting, all of which should be normal occurrence in our lives.

Let us learn to pray aright and to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Let us be free from covetousness and greed, seeking first God's eternal kingdom and righteousness and storing up treasure in heaven while living free from anxiety.

Let us not be judgmental, hypocritical or condemning, but let us learn to judge righteously.

Let us ask, seek and knock in full faith and assurance, and let us love our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us urge everyone to enter through the narrow gate and to avoid the broad road to destruction.

Let us warn against false prophets and teachers.

Let us make clear that not everyone who says to Jesus, "Lord! Lord!" will enter his kingdom but only those who do the will

of His Father.

And let us be reminded of the terrible consequences of hearing Jesus' words but not acting on them—reminding both ourselves and others—speaking also of the fire of hell, as Jesus did.

If we'll do this, empowered by the Spirit and with grace and truth, it won't be long before people say, "If only we could go back to those Ten Commandments! They were far less demanding than Jesus."