

## 'Ev ἀρχῆ with David Mappes, PhD. “What Should Christian do with Andy Stanley’s, Irresistible?”

Mark McGinniss

Because of the popularity of Andy Stanley’s new book, *Irresistible*, I have asked my good friend and colleague, David Mappes to write a review of this book. As a biblical scholar steeped in theological method, I wanted David not only to point out the book’s obvious errors (which many reviews have already accomplished) but to show how his incorrect theological method leads to careless theological practices such as jettisoning the OT.

As the editor of the JMAT it was my pleasure to sit down with David to discuss the book.

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**MARK:** David, thanks for writing the review and taking time to discuss the book. What motivated you to write the article critiquing Stanley’s *Irresistible* in the first place? There are countless books being written, so why this one?

**DAVID:** I am deeply troubled by the impact Stanley’s book is having on students and ministry leaders. His book is filled with humorous rhetorical wit that can mask his deficient hermeneutical and anemic Theological Method making analysis difficult. He often advances his thesis through a kind of rhetorical fire-side-chat kind of discussion that appeals to some readers. His incorrect thesis of detaching the church from the Old Testament can appear as a legitimate option only because of his communication style. I was also concerned regarding Stanley’s response to his critics. Stanley repeatedly deflects and depreciates his critics unless they have personally met with him as he cites Matthew 18. As a mega-church pastor with a reported personal net worth of over 40 million dollars serving in a church network that reaches over 100,000 people weekly, Stanley knows that few detractors can simply email or call him for a visit. I

found his book and his comments regarding his detractors to be very troubling so I wrote the critique.

**MARK:** I agree. My concern as an OT prof is that, while Stanley is correct that some churches have misused the OT, instead of rebuking those churches, he jettisons the entire OT! Stanley states that the reason the church is resistible is due to the fact that “the mixing, blending, and integration of the old with the new that makes the modern church so resistible. It’s the mixing, blending, and integration of the old (Old Testament) with the new (New Testament) that makes our faith indefensible in this misinformation age” (25). Thus, because the church still believes, clings to, defends and sometimes incorrectly applies the OT, the church is resistible to the unbelieving world. This is Stanley’s main premise. While he is certainly correct, that at times some churches have been guilty at times of appealing to some OT laws and not others, it is wrong to say a misuse of the Law invalidates the entire OT canon.

What concerns you most about the Stanley’s methodology?

**DAVID:** Like many of the sociological-church growth movement leaders, Stanley is looking for that one single, silver bullet solution to offset the demise of Christianity in West. Ministry is a robust and spiritual endeavor that simply defies any one single-solution approach. I am also deeply troubled that Stanley promotes a method to contextualize Christianity apart from the full revelation of God; he is confusing contextualization with cultural accommodation to gain a listening ear. He believes that by detaching the Christianity from the Old Testament (and even some New Testament truth), he will free the church from some of the embarrassing questions posited by skeptics. Thus, according to Stanley the church will have a more credible voice to re-contextualize itself into the 21<sup>st</sup> century once the Old Testament with these embarrassing questions are unmixed from Christianity. He is promoting very similar errors to the former Emerging Church and those who seek to “de-foundationalize” Christian doctrine to foster contextualization.

**MARK:** David, you would agree that it needs to be stated at the fore that Stanley is to be commended for his heart for the lost. It would be wonderful if the church would be faithful in presenting the gospel clearly and those who hear would respond in faith. However, after this agreement is where many of the issues lie with his book. Stanley believes that Jesus was “irresistible” (15). However, is this statement even biblically true? Even after Jesus’ resurrection there were only “about hundred and twenty people” in the opening chapter of Acts (1:15). If one adds the “more than 500” that Jesus appeared to after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:6) the sum is under a 1000 people. If Jesus was so irresistible in his life and resurrection, where were the crowds to show his irresistibility and Stanley correct? Even the soldiers who had reported Jesus’ resurrection to the chief priests resisted believing when they were bribed to keep their mouths shut (Matt 28:11-15). Jesus himself knew he would be resistible to many when he declared to the disciples the world’s response to him and the church would be one of hatred (John 15:18-25).

What are some of the greatest theological problems that Stanley promotes?

**DAVID:** Stanley’s text is filled with so many theological and methodological errors it is difficult to pick just a few. He mischaracterizes the God of the Old Testament as a God of anger and wrath who accommodated himself to the Canaanite pantheon of gods while contrasting the God of the New Testament as a God of love. This is a fundamental error. He also promotes a flawed view of Biblical Inspiration that depreciates the authority of Scripture by arguing the Scriptural authors were inspired but not the actual text of Scripture. This egregious error then leads him to separate God’s authority from the authority of Scripture. He consequently diminishes the nature and role of Scripture in the Church.

He also ignores how Christian leaders use (or should use) a robust theological method to weight doctrinal truth and categorize varying interpretative positions (doctrinal taxonomy). Pastoral theology and apologetics should be the apex of an

exegetical process with biblical & systematic theology. Stanley seems to promote a kind apologetic apart from any kind of quality exegesis and theological method. He creates unnecessary proof-texting errors and contradictions to promote his own thesis.

**MARK:** I agree that there are certainly a number of issues in this book. A major error that Stanley makes is that he continually confuses the OT canon and the Old Covenant. We both agree that Stanley is certainly correct that we are not under the Old Covenant either by sacrifice (the book of Hebrews) or Law (Acts 15 and Galatians). However, this does not justify his “we are dragging along a litany of old covenant concepts and assumptions that slow us down, divide us up, and confuse those standing on the outside peering in” (92). The Apostle Paul had no qualms about appealing to the Law in his command to children in Eph 6:1-3 or using the OT as examples for Christian living today (1 Cor 10:1-11).

Do you have any suggestions for pastors and the American church?

**DAVID:** I have two. First, rather than simply detach the Old Testament from Christianity, pastors should foster a culture of biblical exposition with correct application in churches. Biblical exposition means to draw the human author’s meaning out from the Scripture by showing how each part of the text relates to the entire book being preached. Once the *meaning* is known then wrestle with how that meaning is *meaningful* to the congregation. This allows the meaning to determine the application and relevancy. Second, I suggest we *re-establish ourselves in the simple-gospel*. We need to relearn the art of redirecting a conversation back to the gospel rather than broadening the gospel (or any truth) for cultural relevancy. And third, rather than accommodating truth for the sake of cultural relevancy, pastors should encourage each believer and each local church to incarnate Christ and truth through the power of the Spirit. Both the body and temple metaphors are used in the New Testament to describe individual believers and local churches manifesting the very presence of God. As believers and churches allow the Spirit

to manifest Himself through our conformity to truth, the *Fruit of the Spirit* will be manifested both individually and corporately- this is the greatest apologetic.

**MARK:** Thanks, David, for taking the time to sit down and discuss the book. I know our readers will profit from reading your review.