

# A Biblical and Theological Critique of Stanley's *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed from the World*

David Mappes

**Abstract:** This article critically interacts and refutes the thesis of Andy Stanley's *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed from the World*. The article demonstrates the biblical-theological, hermeneutical, and methodological errors in Stanley's thesis and argument. The article interacts and critiques Stanley's incorrect thesis that the church in America is impotent due to integrating Old Testament truth into the New Testament Church as he proposes that the church needs to be "unhitched" and "unmixed" from the Old Testament thereby eliminating the need to defend the historical reliability of the Old Testament.

Key Words: Old Testament, apologetics, inerrancy, inspiration, unhitched

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**A**ndy Stanley is a master communicator, popular author, and prominent pastor who has achieved a celebrity status. His Atlanta-based North Point Ministries consists of six churches with a network of over 70 churches that serve 118,000

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<sup>1</sup> This article is partially revised from an earlier publication by Mappes that appeared as "Stanley's 'Irresistible' Is a Dangerous Disappointment" published in *Baptist Bulletin* Digital Edition May/June 2019 (<https://www.garbc.org/commentary/stanleys-irresistible-is-a-dangerous-disappointment/>)

<sup>2</sup> David Mappes (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) teaches courses in New Testament and theology at Liberty University, Clarks Summit University, Baptist Bible Seminary, and Temple Baptist Seminary, and is director of Noble & Knowable Truth Ministries. © Dr. David Mappes (all rights reserved). Dr. Mappes can be reached at [dmappes@clarkssummitu.edu](mailto:dmappes@clarkssummitu.edu).

people weekly, according to the flyleaf of *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed from the World*.

In this book, Stanley argues that the church with its modern version of faith is ineffective and too easily resisted. Stanley conjectures that the modern church and Christianity are resistible because the Old Testament is mixed into Christianity and that believers sense the need to defend the Old Testament's historicity and accuracy, which leads to alienating "post-Christians."

*Irresistible* is filled with clever phrases, including chapter titles such as "Temple Tantrum," "Splittin' Up," "Homebodies," "The Apoplectic Apostle," "Trending Horizontal," "Obsolete-r Than Ever." The book combines previous sermons and podcasts with seminars from recent years. Stanley uses wit, humor, satire, anecdotal comments, wordplay, and wordsmithing. He combines these with a few semitechnical discussions and ties it all together through storytelling and aphorisms to advance his belief that the church must become "unhitched" and "unmixed" from the OT. He uses his rhetorical skills to urge believers against integrating OT truth into Christianity, dissuading believers from defending the historical reliability and believability of the Old Testament.

Unfortunately *Irresistible* is constructed on flawed missiology, as Stanley confuses contextualization with accommodation and errant methodology while confusing progressive revelation and the fulfillment motif with a kind of all-or-nothing authoritative application of the entire Old Testament. Stanley creates a false dichotomy as he presupposes that if the OT is authoritative, all of the OT must be equally authoritatively applied to all Christians regardless of any OT context. *Irresistible* exemplifies logical errors; simplistic exegesis, which is often eisegesis; errant theology; reductionism; and very serious hermeneutical errors.

### **Stanley's Contributions are Marred by His Thesis**

Pastor Stanley's wordsmithing and rhetorical wit complicate a substantive review and analysis of his book. At times he speaks highly of the OT as Israel's history, while at other times he misrepresents and disparages the OT, its historicity, truthfulness, and inspiration. One wonders if Stanley's hermeneutical incoherency and forced contradictions illustrate his own

misunderstanding between theologizing and communicating theology. Theological method (the practice of literal interpretation and proper application and defense of Scripture) is far different from contextualizing theology. Messengers, teachers, and preachers are called to faithfully dispense the word of God as a steward. This trust entails speaking clearly, consistently, and accurately about the word of truth. Stanley's book falls far short in this regard. While the book does present some positive insights and contributions in respect to post-Christians and contemporary ministry challenges, these contributions are unfortunately marred by Stanley's thesis.

As can be imagined, Stanley's book has generated both fierce controversy and vigorous support. Al Mohler writes that Stanley

represents a new face of theological liberalism. . . . [So Stanley] is playing the role that was played by Harry Emerson Fosdick in the early twentieth century. . . . [Just as Fosdick] sought to rescue Christianity from itself, from its doctrines and truth claims [by citing] his own deconversion stories for the remaking of Christianity [so also does Stanley]<sup>3</sup>

Others such as Piper provide guarded comments of support in suggesting that Stanley is concerned about winning post-Christians and that the church should

join him in moving beyond simplistic and naïve-sounding shibboleths [and follow him] in cultural awareness and insight into your audience [and] in the excellence of his teaching and communication skills . . . and then spend eight years blowing your people's post-Christian circuits by connecting the voltage of every line in the book of Romans with their brains<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Getting 'Unhitched' from the Old Testament? Andy Stanley Aims at Heresy," August 10, 2018, <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/10/getting-unhitched-old-testament-andy-stanley-aims-heresy/>.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "Open Bibles, Burning Hearts: A Response to Andy Stanley," October 25, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/open-bibles-burning-hearts>.

Any book has a thesis, and any thesis contains two literary components: a subject and a complement (the complement is what the author says about the subject or how the author proves the subject). Few can disagree with Pastor Stanley's general subject. The church needs to be more irresistible so that the "nones" (unchurched nonbelievers) and the "deconverted" (those who left Christianity) will have fewer reasons to discredit Christianity. He summarizes his subject by writing, "So why doesn't everybody in America go to church? Perhaps it's because our modern version of faith is easy to resist and thus easy to dismiss" (322).

The problem with *Irresistible* is not so much the general subject but rather the complement to the subject. Stanley argues that since Christianity is completely new, being built upon the new covenant, and since the old covenant and OT are completely fulfilled, Christianity therefore must be detached or unmixed from the OT. Hence Christians should, he says, simply dismiss the OT challenges that many post-Christians find objectionable. Stanley downgrades the OT for apologetic purposes and for ministry contextualization.

### **Imbalance in Contextualization Leads to Cultural Accommodation**

The pursuit of *knowing biblical truth* in American evangelicalism is being replaced with pursuing the immediate *value or relevance or practicality of truth*. This transition has created an imbalance in contextualization that oftentimes leads to cultural accommodation. Unfortunately, Stanley seems to be pursuing this end. One popular trend in American evangelicalism is to view some OT events as fictitious or as literary, nonhistorical episodes that simply have a broader narrative purpose. This trend is driven by a view of critical-cultural-historical-scientific primacy that denies *sola Scriptura* and shifts the interpretative context from Scripture to the critical-cultural-historical-scientific context as an interpretive lens. A number of self-identified evangelical scholars and certainly many post-conservative scholars today reject the historicity of Adam and Eve being progenitors of the human race, God's justice in Noah's flood, the Red Sea judgment, the Canaanite genocide, elements

of prophecy, and so forth. Stanley argues that the historicity or even believability of some OT events is simply unimportant since the OT is an obsolete record of the Hebrews and Israel. He also minimizes and/or rejects the importance of infallibility and inerrancy. Contextualization must consider both the message of truth and the medium that communicates the message. Stanley actually accommodates the truth of Scripture to enhance the medium and receptivity.

Stanley is indeed positing a novel version of apologetics to promote Christianity, albeit an anemic and unbiblical one. Biblical apologetics is to explain and defend Scriptural truth claims to provide justification for the truthfulness of theistic belief and Christianity, which hopefully will lead to personal faith in Christ and his work. Stanley simply makes the Old Testament obsolete, alleging it is all fulfilled and thereby dismissing any skeptical challenges. He believes that by unhitching and removing the OT from the Christian faith, the church will not be sidetracked to answer many of the tough and even embarrassing questions presented in the OT.

### **Stanley's Method Promotes a Non-Orthodox Theological Method**

Stanley is not simply promoting a new apologetic. He surmises that his thesis needs to be integrated into every aspect of faith and practice so Christians themselves do not stumble over skepticism. His approach requires a different and nonorthodox method in how to theologize (applying theological method). To unhitch the OT from Christianity, thereby removing 39 canonical books from Christian theologizing, is indeed dangerous and leaves incredible gaps in one's theological system. This approach will eventually lead to a kind of Christian critical-cultural-historical-scientific syncretism.

Stanley's theological method evidences additional and very serious concerns. He correctly speaks of the resurrection as the determinative event of Christianity. Indeed both Christ and his atoning work are the supreme revelatory work of God. However, Stanley continually contrasts this revelatory event of the Resurrection with the record of the event in the NT Scriptures. He consistently downgrades the NT as a record of the

resurrection (293–300). The NT is not simply a record of the resurrection event; but, rather, the NT is itself revelatory and carries the authority of God. Stanley prefers to say the writers of Scripture were inspired (not the Scriptures, 302), and he does not treat the NT as God's authoritative revelation.

Stanley confuses prescriptive normative truths that have direct, immediate application and relevance to the new covenant believer with descriptive truths that may not directly apply to believers today. There are truths that do not have immediate application though these truths still play a critical part of a Biblical-theological foundational system. Many OT passages may not directly and immediately apply to new covenant believers. However, if these truth assertions are not true, or are not historical, or are unhitched from Christianity, then Christianity will cease to be fully Christian. Stanley does not interact in any manner with the negative consequences to the Christian faith (or with constriction to the epistemic structures of knowledge) if such truths as the creation account, the fall of mankind, or the Psalter, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, or the prophetic literature, etc. are excluded. One important component of Christian apologetics is to appeal to the entire metanarrative of Scripture in presenting a consistent, coherent worldview. Stanley's method disallows this important apologetic tool.

While Stanley correctly affirms that people need not know or fully understand all the Scripture to become a Christian, he seems to reject the notion that OT Scriptures must be historically accurate and true if anyone is to become a Christian. Jesus himself repeatedly authenticated the veracity and knowability of the OT. If the OT is not true or is not historical, Jesus—who repeatedly claimed the OT was indeed true and historical—would be a false prophet. Additionally, NT writers repeatedly cited the OT as inspired and as true as they integrated OT into the new covenant. If Christianity ever needed to compromise OT truth to accommodate hostile cultural views for purposes of contextualization, it would be at the inception of Christianity. But the NT writers did exactly opposite of Stanley's suggestions.

Many of the current Old Testament challenges that Stanley probably hopes to dissuade the church from defending are also

present in the New Testament. Just a few examples include the persons of Adam and Eve as the progenitors of the entire human race (Luke 3:38; Act 17:26), marriage as a one man–one woman lifelong union (Matt 19:4–6), Cain (Jude 11), Abel (Heb 11:4), God’s retributive justice including eternal judgment and exclusivism of faith alone in the Messiah (Christ) alone (Matt 25:46), Noah’s flood judgment (Luke 17:26–27), Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29), and Balaam’s transgression (Jude 11). Additionally, many moral laws in the NT are rooted in the OT.

Stanley correctly focuses on Christ’s resurrection as the key apologetic event and as a key component of the gospel, though he does so at the exclusion of all other Biblical evidences for theistic belief. In the Luke 16:19–31 account of Lazarus, when the unbelieving rich man in eternal torment begs for the Lord to send a messenger to warn his unbelieving family of impending judgment, Jesus says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16: 31). Stanley is simply naïve to suggest that accommodating the historicity of the OT will gain a credible hearing for evangelism.

In the section on reordering, Stanley posits that the “folks in the fourth century made a mistake front-loading *the Holy Bible* with the Law and the Prophets” (284). Stanley suggests that the “Christian Bible should precede the Hebrew Bible since if “it weren’t for the New Testament, there wouldn’t be an Old Testament” (284). He repeatedly and mistakenly implies that all of the OT is synonymous with old covenant law or is simply stories. He then mistakenly argues that all aspects of the old covenant and the entire OT were fulfilled and thus brought to completion.

He further errs when stating that the fourth-century church leaders gave the Hebrew Scriptures the “same authority as the Gospels and epistles” when “the Hebrew Scriptures were bound together with the Christian Scriptures” (155). The NT writers always viewed the OT just as inspired and just as authoritative as the NT; not to do so was considered heresy. Stanley confuses authority and inspiration of all Scripture with covenant application to a particular reader. The writer’s meaning in Scripture always governs the application or meaningfulness to

the reader. As Paul stood before the Roman governor Felix, he said, "According to the Way, which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14).<sup>5</sup>

### **Stanley Incorrectly Posits the Old Testament is Completely Fulfilled**

Stanley is correct that the twenty-first century church and the church throughout history has at times incorrectly understood the Old Testament and in some cases has used the Old Testament to subjugate and coerce others. Rather than discussing the hermeneutical mistakes and complexities that led to abuses, he simply posits that the entire Old Testament is now fulfilled and should be detached from the New Testament.

He incorrectly argues that the mere appearance of fulfillment formula in the New Testament refers to complete, exhaustive fulfillment of all Old Testament promises and prophecies. He repeatedly cites the Abrahamic promises as being completely fulfilled, since Abraham was blessed by God and since Christ came through Abraham's lineage. Stanley writes that Jesus uses the fulfillment formula as his way of saying "God's conditional, temporary covenant with Israel was coming to an end, the intended-from-the-beginning end" (109). Stanley ignores the

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<sup>5</sup> For further critique of these kind of theological and hermeneutical issues see the following articles by Mappes: "Navigating the Theological Fog," *Israel My Glory*, March/April 2018, 24-27; "Literal Interpretation and Theological Method: What Is It and How to Do It?" *Ariel Ministries*, December 2017, 18-23; "How to Think about and Practice Theology," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Spring 2014): 65-85; "Biblical Apologetics and Ministry Today," *Paraklesis* (Spring 2013), 1, 4; "Love Wins by Rob Bell: A Biblical and Theological Critique," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Spring 2012): 87-121; "What Is Faith in Luke 18:1-8," *BibSac* (July-September 2010): 292-306; "Nobility and Knowability of Scripture: Part Two," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Fall 2009): 1-23; "Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part One," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Spring 2009): 64-105; "A New Kind of Christian: A Review," *BibSac* (July-September 2004): 289-303.

unconditional land promises given to Abram and his descendants (Israel) that have not yet been fulfilled; he ignores all the future unfulfilled promises in the prophetic literature; and he disreputes the Song of Solomon as well, since the writer had over 300 wives.

Sometimes Scriptural writers use the New Testament–fulfillment formula to confirm that a NT incident agrees with the OT, while at other times they use it to explain a point given in the OT or to draw a parallel between a NT event and an OT incident. Sometimes the NT writers indicate complete exhaustive fulfillment, while at other times they point out that only one aspect of a prophecy was satisfied. Stanley fails to acknowledge any of these NT uses of the OT complexities. The immediate NT–context use of the OT passage must always be compared to the OT–historical text to validate its type of usage and fulfillment.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Stanley incorrectly avers that Jesus’ prediction of Daniel’s future “abomination of desolation” in Matthew 24 (and the other Gospels) does not refer to the end time, or last days, but rather was fully fulfilled in the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70 (62–65). Stanley develops this incorrect interpretation to support his view that Judaism and thus the OT authority ended in AD 70. This promotion of preterist eschatology ignores the actual context of Matthew 24. Jesus qualifies his prediction through universal, global, cosmic language. He described this future abomination of desolation as the worst tribulation from “the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt 24:21) and links the termination of this Great Tribulation to his own second coming (Matt 24:27–31). Stanley simply decontextualizes the “abomination of desolation” description, a common practice by evangelical preterists in their attempts to answer liberal and skeptical critics who oppose predictive prophecy.

Stanley also uses replacement nomenclature, suggesting some agreement with reformed theology that the church has permanently replaced Israel. Additionally, he incorrectly argues

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<sup>6</sup> See my “Literal Interpretation and Theological Method: What Is It and How to Do It?” *Ariel Ministries*, December 2017, 18–23.

that Deuteronomy's genre alone (being in the ancient treaty Suzerain vassal form) proves its complete conditionality.<sup>7</sup>

### **Stanley's View of Objectors and Skeptics is Flawed**

Stanley is correct that some apologetic methods successfully used throughout the modern era are less effective in this postmodern era and that the church should be open to rebranding some of its apologetic methodologies and ministries. He is also correct that many children raised in the church leave "the faith" during their college and young adult years. He avers that evangelicals sense the apologetic need to "defend the entire Bible, including God's temporary covenant with Israel, in order to defend Christianity [because of] our time-honored tradition of mixing, matching, and equating what God clearly separated" (110). He further argues that "the majority of people I've talked to who've abandoned their faith have lost faith in Jesus because they lost confidence in the Bible. . . . the Old Testament" (110). Stanley is to be commended for dialoguing with those who have rejected their faith; however, most pastoral-apologists point to a lack of Christian charity and church integrity that leads to stumbling and rejection. Stanley fails to acknowledge that most of the OT truths people find objectionable are also repeated or affirmed in the NT. Furthermore, skeptics who deny OT events often also deny miraculous NT events. Stanley provides no examples of NT writers suggesting that the OT is less than historically accurate, nor does he provide any examples of NT writers depreciating the OT.

The skepticism of objectors is never only an intellectual issue but always has a spiritual component. Authentic living, dialogue, and removing embarrassing, difficult challenges do not create a neutral affinity with a nonbeliever. A far better method entails authentic, Spirit-empowered living while continually pivoting to

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<sup>7</sup> For an extensive critique and rebuttal of some of these views, see David A. Mappes and H. Wayne House, "A Biblical and Theological Discussion of Traditional Dispensational Premillennialism," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 5–56.

the gospel message and respectfully explaining biblical-theological doctrine within a reasonable taxonomy of belief.

Stanley is creating an apologetic that actually accommodates the Scripture to the views of the “nones” and the “deconverted” that he is attempting to reach. He recasts biblical inspiration and the authority of Scripture. He also excludes the OT as a viable apologetic and theological source. Additionally and sadly, he hints at the classic liberal view of differentiating and distinguishing the angry God of the OT and the loving God of the NT.

### **Stanley’s Characterization of God is Irresponsible**

Incredibly Stanley asserts that God’s loving nature is unique to the New Testament, as he writes, “*God is love* is a uniquely Christian idea” (223). Stanley indicates that God loved only his covenant people in the Old Testament. He contrasts this inadequate statement of God’s OT love while writing that the OT God was nonetheless separate and unapproachable, living behind a curtain. Elsewhere Stanley describes the God of the OT as angry, judgmental, and mad, “putting everybody in time-out” (251). Then he asserts that “righteous anger is a thing, as long as we hover over the Old Testament anyway” (251).

To caricature the Great “I AM” through this kind of rhetorical wit is simply irresponsible in any setting and for any reason. Consider what Stanley says when describing the ancient world warfare: “The gods of the ancient world were human rights violators. . . . This was standard fare . . . [so that if] the God of [the] Jews was going to establish a nation for himself, he would have to wade into the fray and play by the rules of the day” (163). Stanley is implying an insidious notion that God necessarily had to accommodate himself to the horrific actions and lies of the ancient Near Eastern world and pantheon of gods. Then he implies that God did not, in the NT, accommodate himself to the vile notions of the Greco-Roman worldview. This kind of cherry picking denigrates the uniqueness of the Scripture as God’s Word and distorts God’s nature. The Great “I AM” of the OT is the same Lord of lords that was revealed in the NT. To suggest otherwise is not orthodox.

Furthermore, Stanley fails to interject that the NT is replete with references to both the love and the wrath of God. Interestingly, when discussing hell, Stanley says that “judgmental Christians are glad there is a hell” (251). He simply discusses the vice of being judgmental and does not address the reality of hell, leaving the reader wondering what Stanley really believes. Certainly the wrath of God is seen throughout the NT in references to eternal damnation and the substitutionary atonement.

### **Stanley's Thesis Promotes a Flawed Understanding of Biblical Inspiration**

Stanley also undermines biblical inspiration and the authority of Scripture, including the New Testament. First, he insists that the Scriptures are not inspired but that, rather, the writers of Scripture were inspired (this is a grave error). Second, he argues that the foundation of one's faith is not the Scriptures but rather God (300–304), thus separating God from his Scriptural self-expression. These false conjectures are very similar to the nonfoundationalists of the emergent church era (now referred to as progressive Christians or postconservatives). Once Biblical inspiration is denied or diminished, the authority of Scripture is skewed by differentiating God's authority from the Scripture.

Stanley incorrectly argues that since the term *Bible* did not exist during the writing of Scripture and since new covenant believers are no longer under the authority of the Old Testament, people must not say “the Bible says” or say “the Word of God says” to appeal to the full force of God's word: believers must not appeal to the authority of the Bible or the Scriptures. Stanley further bolsters his case by clever wordsmithing as he promotes an errant view of canonicity, writing, “The Bible did not create Christianity. It's the other way around” (111), thus promoting a liberal view of canonicity.

In the strictest sense, the term *Bible* may have not been used until the canon was fully discovered and put into the collected codex form; however, the apostles repeatedly referred to both their writings and the OT as Scripture. Before the canon was fully recognized, church fathers also spoke of both Testaments as comprising Scripture. When Tertullian (AD 155–230) rebutted

the heresy of the gnostic Marcion (AD 85–160), who denied the authority of the OT, he used the nomenclature of the “Old Testament” and “New Testament” as supporting Christ because they were both equally Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Long before the full canon was put into codex form, both works-righteous legalism and Gnosticism were fully rejected on the basis of the Old Testament as authoritative Scripture.

Stanley’s comments are alarming. For example, he refers to “a group of *textless* Jesus followers” (306) to deemphasize canonicity and inspiration, writing that the “credibility of our faith is not contingent upon our text being infallible or inerrant.” It rests securely in an “event” (the resurrection, 306). He ignores the fact that the Scriptures, which he says need not be inerrant, both teach and theologize the resurrection.

Stanley argues that when “skeptics point out the violence, the misogyny, the scientific and historically unverifiable claims of the Hebrew Bible, instead of trying to defend those things, we can shrug, give ’em our best confused look . . . [and simply say] ‘My Christian faith isn’t based on any of that’” (290). Astonishingly he opines that our faith does not “teeter on the brink of extinction” or collapse based on the archaeology, history, historicity, credibility, or “even the believability of the Old Testament” (290). Stanley does not adequately address that approximately 10 percent of the NT is composed of OT quotations, with some scholars asserting that up to 28 percent of the NT is composed of allusions to the OT. Stanley’s position is illogical. The resurrection of Christ authenticated Jesus’ person, work, and words, including Jesus’ belief in the historicity of the OT. Every NT writer appeals to the historicity and accuracy of

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<sup>8</sup> See Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion Book Four*, chapter 6 (I appreciate this observation by Dr. Mark McGinniss). John Bright’s classic text *The Authority of the Old Testament* provides in-depth assessment of various theories that downplay or even de-canonize the Old Testament. The text *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012) is also very helpful.

the OT. In fact, Peter devotes the entire second chapter of 2 Peter to using the OT as proof positive of the promise of future judgment at the return of Christ.

Stanley's kind of truth denial, accommodation, and double-speak is not just limited to his view of the OT. Stanley preached a Christmas sermon on Dec. 4, 2016, in which he muses that some people view the miraculous virgin birth of Christ as a form of mythology. He then says, "If somebody could predict their own death and their own resurrection, I'm not all that concerned about how they got into the world, because the whole resurrection thing is so amazing and . . . Christianity doesn't hinge on the truth or even the stories around the birth of Jesus. It really hinges on the resurrection of Jesus."<sup>9</sup> In this instance Stanley goes beyond the OT and dismisses the doctrinal importance of the historical virgin birth. Stanley also completely distorts Paul's teaching of the husband-wife marital roles through superficial exegesis that minimizes, if not rejects, Paul's marital instruction regarding husband and wife marital roles (213). These examples demonstrate that Stanley is also willing to accommodate NT truth in his apologetic.

Stanley is correct that churches add unnecessary components to the gospel so that the gospel is at times too enculturated. He also correctly reveals the importance of engaging those who are doubting or are outright skeptics. Believers do need to learn the art of recrafting conversation and debate, thereby leading people back to the heart of the gospel rather than being sidetracked. Recrafting a conversation does not, however, entail recrafting, dismissing, or accommodating truth. Ministry leaders are called to equip the church to understand, practice, and defend the historical, Scriptural truthfulness of Christianity and the Bible. Stanley's clever wordsmithing and methodology serve to undermine legitimate apologetics.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://northpoint.org/messages/who-needs-christmas/> accessed February 14, 2019. Stanley later affirmed that he stands in the orthodox Christian traditions regarding the incarnation of Jesus as presented in Matthew and Luke.

Apologetics and pastoral theology are the *result* and *not a replacement* of a robust theological method. Literal interpretation entails *discerning the intention of the Scriptural human writer by examining what that writer affirms in the historical context of his own writing*. Careful exegesis is followed by formulating a biblical theology of that text or writer. Then a systematic theology is formulated through integrating truth from biblical theology. The pinnacle of one's theological method is pastoral theology and apologetics.

### **Conclusion**

Stanley's call for this novel apologetic reveals an anemic theological method that has resulted in denying what the Scriptures teach about themselves. This denial then leads to confusing contextualization of the faith with cultural accommodation. Christian truth cannot be adequately contextualized or defended unless there is clear understanding at the exegetical and theological level. Unfortunately Stanley is making the Bible resistible to make his faith dialogue and ministry appear irresistible.