

# Andy Stanley – Unhitching Christianity from the Bible

An Evaluation by Dr. David A. DeWitt

I have been repeatedly asked to comment on the teaching of Andy Stanley. I have decided to comment only on the material he has produced about what he calls being “unhitched” from “Jewish Scriptures.” After spending some time reading and listening to many of Andy Stanley’s presentations, I think I understand his “unhitched” position. After my critique, I have included an Appendix which documents longer excerpts (about three pages) of his sermons and statements. If you are unfamiliar with his views, it might be best to read the “Appendix” or listen to his sermon on his book “Irresistible” before reading my evaluations. [That sermon can be found at [http://northpoint.live/messages/reclaiming-irresistible.](http://northpoint.live/messages/reclaiming-irresistible)]



## An Evaluation of Andy Stanley’s Message: “To Unhitch the Christian Faith from Their Jewish Scriptures”

### 1. Andy Stanley says he has not changed his own position on the Bible

Stanley says,

“Given enough time and interest, you can defend the Bible...I did not change what I believed...But what did change is my approach to talking about the Bible. I stopped saying anything that would support this notion that as the Bible goes so goes Christianity.”

**Comment:** I have heard people say something like, “What happened to Andy Stanley? He used to believe in the Bible.” But it’s unfair to say he has changed his position on the Bible. He clearly says he has not, so we must take him at his word. I couldn’t find exactly what he believes about the Bible (Reliability? Accuracy? Inerrancy? Infallibility?), but he definitely says the Bible can be defended as being true, and he has not changed his mind about that. What he has changed his mind about is what he is going to teach about the Bible, namely, that the resurrection of Jesus, not the Bible, should be seen as the basis of Christianity.

### 2. Andy Stanley says his motive for unhitching Christianity from the Bible is to protect “the next generation” from “skeptics” who disprove some part of the Bible

Referring to the 66 books of the Bible, Stanley says,

...it’s like a 66-card, house of cards...if one part of it isn’t true, then the Bible isn’t true, and if the Bible isn’t true, then Christianity is false...I have done my best these last few years to step back, to step back and to teach, and to preach from the standpoint of anchoring your faith and the faith of your student, and the faith of our churches, to the event of the resurrection rather than the authority of Scripture.

**Comment:** Notice, everything the liberal progressive world does is a move away from the Bible.

- **First** of all, Stanley’s assumption is wrong. Kids aren’t leaving Christianity because some “skeptic” disproved some detail of the Bible. They are leaving because the church did not teach them the Bible, the very thing he has decided not to do.
- **Second**, Stanley’s decision about what to teach ignores the significance of Biblical inerrancy. Jesus said, “*For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished*” (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17). The approach of Jesus to skeptics was to declare the inerrancy of every word of Scripture, not to unhitch His message from it. He faced every temptation of Satan with Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12). He told the Sadducees, “*Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or*

*the power of God?*” (Mark 12:24). Jesus hitched His message to inerrancy of every word of the Jewish Scripture.

- **Third**, all the problems involved in basing Christianity on the Bible as a “house of cards,” also applies to basing Christianity on the resurrection. What about the skeptics who claim to have disproved the resurrection? It’s just a different “house of cards.” The Bible and the resurrection can both be defended because they are both, actually, in reality, true. So why limit our defense to the resurrection? And, by the way, apologetics is for believers not unbelievers. A defense of the Bible is not about converting the lost or keeping them from leaving our churches. The reason we defend the credibility of the Bible is to strengthen and encourage believers.

**2 Timothy 4:2** *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

### **3. Andy Stanley confuses separation from the Mosaic Law with separation from Scripture**

Stanley says,

“[First century] church leaders unhitched the church from the worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish scriptures,” ... “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well...I’m telling you, you take Old Testament values and imperatives and you mix them with New [Testament values and imperatives], you end up with a mess, and you end up with a message that unnecessarily drives people away from the Gospel.”

**Comment:** For sure, the apostles disconnected the church from the Mosaic Law, i.e., the age of grace from the age of the law. Paul said, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). But Paul never “unhitched the church from the world view [or] value system of the Jewish scriptures.” It’s one of the wonders of the Bible that from Genesis to Revelation we have the same God, the same righteousness, the same “world view” and “value system.” Paul referred Timothy to the Old Testament, when he said, *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter’s message in Acts 2, Stephen’s message in Acts 7, Paul’s messages in Acts 13, 17, and 28 are a development of Old Testament Scripture. *And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them and for three sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures* (Acts 17:2). After His resurrection, Jesus talked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But, rather than talk about His resurrection, instead, *beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures* (Luke 24:27). By unhitching Christianity from Jewish Scriptures, Stanley is dismissing the significance of prophecy. It is from the Jewish Scriptures, 1000 years before the resurrection, we learn, *they pierced my hands and my feet...they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots* (Psalm 22:16-18). Seven hundred years before Jesus’s resurrection, we learn that *He was pierced through for our transgressions...The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him* (Isaiah 53:5-6). To unhitch Christianity from Jewish Scripture is contrary to the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

### **4. Andy Stanley believes Christianity “never has been” based on the Bible**

Stanley says,

“...the whole point of the Reformation [is] that the church is not the final authority, the Bible is the final authority for Christians.... It’s not, and it never has been ...Jesus rose from the dead, that’s where we anchor our faith, and that’s where we must anchor the faith of the next generation.”

**Comment:** Andy Stanley makes a very good case for the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel (Paul says so in 1 Corinthians 15). But there are some significant problems with anchoring Christianity to the resurrection of Jesus. Just because it is necessary does not mean it is sufficient. The Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is significant because of who He is, and what His death accomplished. We cannot just focus on the resurrection of Jesus as an event isolated from the whole counsel of God's revelation, which we have collected together in what we call the Bible. What about the deity of Jesus, the incarnation of God in the flesh. What about the reason He died...*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...the wages of sin is death...we were dead in our transgressions* (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Ephesians 2:5). Why are the deity of Christ and the substitutionary death of Christ and the fact that He was the prophesied Messiah not also a basis of Christianity (2 Corinthians 5:21)? It's not just one thing about Christ that is the basis of Christianity.

## **5. Andy Stanley believes much of the Bible is unnecessary for Christianity**

Stanley says,

“You can have Genesis, you can have Leviticus, you can have Exodus, you can have Revelation, you can have Philemon, you can have First, Second and Third John, just give me two gospels and First Corinthians, game on.”

**Comment:** By what possible authority can Stanley choose to select certain books and proclaim others to be nonessential? No apostle or author of the New Testament, including the authors of the books Stanley wants to keep, considered some of the revelation of God unnecessary.

- **2 Peter 1:21** *Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*
- **John 17:17** *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*
- **Matthew 4:4** *But He answered, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

## **6. Andy Stanley is trying to reach the masses, not be used of God to reach individuals**

Stanley said,

“I feel [what] I needed to do was to address the fatal flaw, the fatal flaw that, as the Bible goes so goes Christianity. So about eight or nine years ago I changed my approach to preaching and teaching...”

**Comment:** Jesus spoke in parables, so the masses would not understand (Matthew 13:13), but Stanley speaks simply so the masses will not leave. Jesus said, “*many are called but few are chosen*” (Matthew 22:14). *He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful* (Revelation 17:14). Christianity is not about reaching the masses for Jesus, or getting them to come to our churches by using a message they are less likely to reject. It's about being available, as the Holy Spirit convicts *the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment* (John 16:8).

## **7. Andy Stanley believes it is not necessary to read the Bible**

Stanley says,

Jesus's most devout first-century followers never owned a Bible, never read a Bible, they couldn't have read the Bible if there was a Bible because most of them couldn't read and there was no Bible to read. And yet, these men and woman turned the world upside down. They're the reason we're here today worshipping Jesus, but they never held a Bible because there was no Bible until the fourth century.

**Comment:** Does Stanley really believe the first-century Christians would have ignored the New Testament if they had one? To say about the first century “there was no Bible to read” or “there was no Bible until the fourth century,” is very misleading. Just because they didn't have something bound in a book with the words ‘HOLY BIBLE’ written on it, does not mean they didn't have the Scripture. The first-century believers had the Old Testament, and the New Testament Scripture was in the process of being revealed and written down. They had the books of New Testament as they were written. And they had them all by the end of the first century. Believers are responsible for what God has revealed at the

time. We can't just ignore some of what God has revealed just because the people in our churches don't have the patience to hear it. The declaration in the fourth century (Athanasius A.D. 367) was simply a recognition that all the 27 Christian books written in the first century, and only those books, were to be added to the Old Testament as Scripture. The apostles and prophets were in the process of revealing those 27 books during the first century, and they recognized them as Scripture as they were written (Ephesians 3:4; 2 Peter 3:16).

And where does Stanley get the idea that most of the first-century church "couldn't read"? Peter was a fisherman with no formal education, and he could not only read, but he wrote two books of the New Testament. [Silvanus helped him with 1 Peter, but its conclusion (5:12-14) and 2 Peter he wrote himself.] Paul was highly educated and wrote a sophisticated text that he assumed could be read and understood. The apostles, who Stanley points out changed the world, were all Jews who were apparently taught to read and memorize Old Testament Scripture at a young age at home and by the rabbis in the synagogues. The best evidence is how much of it is quoted in their sermons, from Peter's first sermon in Acts 2 to Paul's last recorded message to the Jews in Acts 28. The discussions of Jesus, and writings of the apostles, revealed that they assumed their audience could read:

- **Matthew 12:5** *Or have you not read in the Law...*
- **Matthew 19:4** *Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female*
- **Matthew 21:16** *and said to Him... have you never read...*
- **Matthew 21:42** *Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures..."*
- **Matthew 22:31** *... have you not read what was spoken to you by God...*
- **Mark 12:10** *Have you not even read this Scripture...*
- **Mark 12:26** *...have you not read in the book of Moses*
- **Luke 6:3** *Have you not even read what David did*
- **Luke 10:26** *What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?*
- **John 19:20** *...the Jews read this inscription...written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek.*
- **Acts 15:21** *For Moses...is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.*
- **Acts 15:31** *When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.*
- **2 Corinthians 1:13** *For we write nothing else to you than what you read*
- **2 Corinthians 3:15** *whenever Moses is read*
- **Ephesians 3:4** *when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ*
- **2 Timothy 4:13** *when you come bring the...scrolls, especially the parchments.*

## 8. Andy Stanley's "gospel" is not the plan of salvation

Stanley says,

"I am more convinced than ever that following Jesus will make your life better and make you better at life, and you should follow Jesus, even if you don't believe...I want to believe it's true, I want to believe in the end everybody gets justice, I want to believe in the end there is forgiveness. I want to believe in the end there is a personal God who has invited me to call Him Father. Why wouldn't everybody want that? I'm totally sold out to the message of the gospel, the message of Jesus."

**Comment:** "The message of Jesus" is not "Jesus will make your life better and make you better at life and you should follow Jesus, even if you don't believe." Whatever Stanley means by the word "gospel" is not what the New Testament spells out as the plan of salvation. Salvation is the message that we are hopelessly lost sinners, Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, and we need to receive Him as our God and Savior, because only His shed blood paid for our sins (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Romans 3:23; 6:23; Romans 5:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). But I didn't hear Andy Stanley say that, anywhere. Did you?

## 9. Andy Stanley declares “it’s okay if you think” some of the Bible “is a myth”

Stanley says,

“Here’s your out. It’s okay if you think this [referring to the book of Jonah] is a myth. It’s okay if you think this never actually happened in history. And by myth, I mean that when this story was written, the person who wrote it never actually thought anyone would believe it was true. It was simply a myth to inspire us...I would like you to consider the book of Jonah to be like your favorite movie, ...a movie that none of it is true, even if it’s sort of based on history...maybe it’s like the best novel you ever read.”

**Comment:** When teaching on the book of Jonah, Stanley said he believed it actually happened and God had the power to do that. But he also said, that there was no need to believe that. It’s okay for his audience to believe it’s just a myth, which he defines as a story where “the person who wrote it never actually thought anyone would believe it was true.” But in the case of Jonah, the author describes it as a historical event, with real people and real places. It’s about a man named Jonah son of Amittai and real places like Nineveh, Joppa, and Tarshish. These are places we can find on a real map of the real world.

**Jonah 1:1-3** *The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish.*

Jesus referred to Jonah as a real event, not a myth. He said, “*for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:40).

None of the Bible is a myth. Of course, there are non-historical stories in the Bible—like poems, parables, and metaphors. But in every case, the author presents them as non-historical poems, parables, and metaphors. In the case of Jonah, the author presents his book as an event, which actually historically happened. But Andy Stanley declares, “It’s okay if you think this is a myth.” If we can take something the author described as historically real and choose to believe he “never actually thought anyone would believe it was true,” then why is that not true of the resurrection of Jesus? Is Stanley’s case for the resurrection of Jesus based on an assumption that “the person who wrote it never actually thought anyone would believe it was true”? It isn’t, of course. Stanley makes a case for the historical resurrection of Jesus. But what kind of hermeneutics allows a preacher to simply declare we can change the author’s clear intended meaning from history to myth, when he thinks the author’s intended meaning would offend his audience? It’s the Word of God that convicts the hearts of men and women, not something we change it into, so it won’t offend people.

- **Hebrews 4:12** *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*
- **2 Timothy 4:3-4** *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will **turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.***
- **Isaiah 66:2** *“But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.*

# Appendix

The following are excerpts from a sermon preached by Andy Stanley, September 30, 2018.

“Fueling this mass exodus [from Christianity]...Skeptics exploited a flaw in the modern version of Christianity because they had something that previous generations of atheists and skeptics didn't have, they had the internet...They have exploited a flaw in our modern post-reformation version of Christianity....And the flaw is simply this, it's a false assumption, it is a shared false assumption regarding the foundation of Christianity. When I say it's a shared assumption, I meant this, that Christians assume this, non-Christians assume this, post-Christians assume this ...if you are considering losing faith or dismissing faith or walking away from faith, this is something you assume as well, and this false assumption that has been with us since the Reformation has finally begun to take root, and we are finally paying a price for it, and it's why I wanted to talk to you about it, and it's why I wrote the book “Irresistible.” Since the Reformation...leaders have taught that the Scripture is the final authority for Christians. This is the whole point of the Reformation, that the church is not the final authority, the Bible is the final authority for Christians....It's not, and it never has been, but most modern Christians think it is, most of the Christians that left the church thought it was...

This assumption has left many with the impression, and justifiably so, that as the Bible goes, so goes the Christian faith. If you can undermine the credibility of the Bible, all 66 books, or any one of the 66 books, or any part of any one of the 66 books of the Bible, then Christianity comes tumbling down. You've heard me say this before, it's like a 66-card, house of cards...if one part of it isn't true, then the Bible isn't true, and if the Bible isn't true, then Christianity is false.... The time has come for us to call out and draw a circle around this false assumption...for your children's sake, for your grandchildren's sake, for this generation's sake, and for the sake of the next generation. With the help of the Internet, skeptics have done a masterful job of exploiting this false assumption about Christianity...You are not going to get a 25-year-old, a 22-year-old, or your brother-in-law or your sister-in-law to wade through a 250-page book, and when that didn't answer all of their questions, give them another 250-page book. If you are really interested in defending the Bible, there's lots of information. But you are not going to get anyone's undivided attention for that long...Given enough time and interest, you can defend the Bible.

So, years ago, I decided that's not the best approach...I don't think I want to spend the rest of my life teaching apologetics and trying to prove to people the Bible is true, because what I feel I needed to do was to address the fatal flaw, the fatal flaw that, as the Bible goes, so goes Christianity. So about eight or nine years ago, I changed my approach to preaching and teaching...

I did not change what I believed. In fact, just the opposite. Just so you know, I am more convinced than ever that following Jesus will make your life better and make you better at life, and you should follow Jesus, even if you don't believe, you should follow. I'm so convinced of that. In fact, I don't know why everybody wouldn't want the message of Christianity to be true....[Why wouldn't everybody say] I want to believe it's true, I want to believe in the end everybody gets justice, I want to believe in the end there is forgiveness, I want to believe in the end there is a personal God who has invited me to call him Father. Why wouldn't everybody want that? I'm totally sold out to the message of the gospel, the message of Jesus. And not only did I not change what I believe, I did not change my view or my respect for the Bible. None of that changed.

But what did change is my approach to talking about the Bible. I stopped saying anything that would support this notion that as the Bible goes, so goes Christianity. I embrace what I believe was the belief of our first-century brothers and sisters as it relates to faith. And their approach was this. It was an approach that argues from and anchors to the event of the resurrection, rather than the authority of the Bible....The reason I am so confident about this is because that's how the first century church survived, and the church thrived. Long before there was Christian Scripture, there were Christians. And not just average Christians...I have done my best these last few years to step back, to step back, and to teach and to preach from the standpoint of anchoring your faith and the faith of your student, and the faith of our churches to the event of the resurrection, rather than the authority of Scripture....

You can have Genesis, you can have Leviticus, you can have Exodus, you can have Revelation, you can have Philemon, you can have First, Second and Third John, just give me two gospels and First Corinthians, game on. Jesus rose from the dead, that's where we anchor our faith, and that's where we must anchor the faith of the next generation.  
[ <http://northpoint.live/messages/reclaiming-irresistible>]

### **A few additional comments by Andy Stanley**

“Well, I never suggested we ‘un-hitch’ from a passage of Scripture or a specific biblical imperative.” “...Again, I was teaching through Acts 15 where Peter, James and Paul recommended the first-century church unhitch (my word, I'm open to an alternative) the law of Moses from the Gospel being preached to Gentiles in Antioch.”... “If you were raised on a version of Christianity that relied on the Bible as the foundation of faith, a version that was eventually dismantled by academia or the realities of life, maybe it's time for you to change your mind about Jesus...If you gave up your faith because of something about or in the Bible, maybe you gave up unnecessarily.” [https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/may/i-never-suggested-we-un-hitch-andy-stanley-walks-back-on-controversial-sermon]

“[First century] church leaders unhitched the church from the worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish Scriptures,” “...Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.”  
[https://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-must-unhitch-old-testament-from-their-faith-says-andy-stanley-223818/]

### **The following can be found on <http://www.piratechristian.com/messedupchurch/2018/5/andy-stanleys-aftermath-series-rejecting-the-bible-to-foster-faith>**

“Jesus's most devout first-century followers never owned a Bible, never read a Bible, they couldn't have read the Bible, if there was a Bible, because most of them couldn't read, and there was no Bible to read. And yet, these men and woman turned the world upside down, they're the reason we're here today worshipping Jesus, but they never held a Bible because there was no Bible until the fourth century. Why are you so quickly persuaded to walk away from faith because of a book that didn't exist when Christianity began?”

—Andy Stanley, Aftermath Part 1, April 14, 2018

“When Paul's eyes were opened, he had extraordinary clarity around the incompatibility of the Old and New Testaments.”

—Andy Stanley, Aftermath Part 2, April 21, 2018

“The Bible teaches that God mostly loves Jews AND the Bible teaches that God loves everybody; they are two incompatible covenants.”

—Andy Stanley, Aftermath Part 2, April 21, 2018

“I’m telling you, you take Old Testament values and imperatives and you mix them with New [Testament values and imperatives], you end up with a mess, and you end up with a message that unnecessarily drives people away from the Gospel. And once upon a time this wasn’t all that big of a deal, because once upon a time, nobody knew that much about the Bible, and they couldn’t find out much about the Bible unless they went to a library, but now everybody is one click away from whatever information they need to dismiss their faith, including your children and grandchildren.”

—Andy Stanley, Aftermath Part 2, April 21, 2018

**The following can be found on**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OsvdE5Vgrc&list=RDIvHvNb12PCE&index=3>**

“Here’s your out. It’s okay if you think this [book of Jonah] is a myth. It’s okay if you think this never actually happened in history. And by myth, I mean that when this story was written, the person who wrote it never actually thought anyone would believe it was true. It was simply a myth to inspire us....I would like you to consider the book of Jonah to be like your favorite movie, the movie that inspired you to be a better parent, work hard....a movie that none of it is true even if it’s sort of based on history... maybe it’s like the best novel you ever read... If you can’t buy the story of Jonah being a part of history, I would just ask you for these next few weeks to put it in the category of a myth with a message.”