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# A RESPONSE TO ANDY STANLEY'S *IRRESISTIBLE*

DANIEL WILEY

In the fall of 2018, Andy Stanley, prolific author and speaker and founder of the Atlanta-based North Point Ministries, released his highly anticipated work *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World*.<sup>1</sup> The text attempts to address a major issue facing the Christian faith at the present time. Numerous modern Americans, and especially millennials, have either rejected the gospel message or abandoned their once-held Christian faith because they have found the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, incompatible with a secular worldview. In response to these concerns, Stanley argues that it is unreasonable to reject Christianity because of any perceived conflict between Christianity and modernistic sensibilities. This is because, according to Stanley, the foundation of the Christian faith does not rest upon the Bible or one's ability to defend the Scripture. Instead, the foundation of the Christian faith is the historic fact of the resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, a defence of the Old Covenant and its historic and ethical difficulties is unnecessary today because of the inauguration of the New Covenant and the establishment of Jesus' new commandment as the Christian's governing ethic. Unfortunately, according to Stanley, many believers feel that they must 'mix and match' Old Covenant standards with New Covenant ethics, yet this synthesis only creates awkward contradictions and discourages modern men and women from accepting the gospel message. Ultimately, believers must make the historicity of the resurrection and Jesus' New Commandment as the centre of the Christian witness and practice if they desire to reach unbelievers in today's culture.

*Irresistible* is the product of the development in Stanley's apologetic method in response to the New Atheism.<sup>2</sup> Its most notable pre-*Irresistible* manifestations include Stanley's three-part sermon series 'Aftermath' preached in April 2018,<sup>3</sup> his three-part sermon series 'Who Needs Christmas' preached in December 2016,<sup>4</sup> and his sermon 'The Bible Told Me So'

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Stanley, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 275, 314.

<sup>3</sup> To view, see Stanley, 'Aftermath', *Northpoint Ministries*, April 2018 <<http://northpointministries.org/messages/aftermath>> [accessed April 16, 2020].

<sup>4</sup> Stanley, 'Who Needs Christmas?', *Rightnow Media*, December 2016 <<https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/364910>> [accessed April 16, 2020].

preached in August 2016.<sup>5</sup> Stanley's proposition for believers to 'unhitch' themselves from the Old Testament, language used in both his 'Aftermath' series and *Irresistible*,<sup>6</sup> put Stanley's work in the spotlight. These messages and *Irresistible* itself received extensive push-back from critics, including responses from Albert Mohler and John Piper.<sup>7</sup> Since the release of *Irresistible*, Stanley has responded to his critics, including on Dallas Theological Seminary's 'Table Podcast'<sup>8</sup> but also in other media outlets, including *Relevant Magazine*,<sup>9</sup> *Christianity Today*,<sup>10</sup> and *A Greater Story*

<sup>5</sup> Stanley, 'The Bible Told Me So', *Your Move with Andy Stanley*, April 2016 <<https://yourmove.is/videos/part-3--the-bible-told-me-so/>> [accessed April 16, 2020]. All three series are available through YouTube.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 72, 158.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Mohler, 'Getting "Unhitched" from the Old Testament? Andy Stanley Aims at Heresy', *Albert Mohler*, August 10, 2018 <<https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/10/getting-unhitched-old-testament-andy-stanley-aims-heresy/>> [accessed March 6, 2019]; 'The Bible Tells Me So: Biblical Authority Denied...Again', *Albert Mohler*, September 26, 2016 <<https://albertmohler.com/2016/09/26/bible-tells-biblical-authority-denied/>> [accessed March 19, 2019]; John Piper, 'Open Bibles, Open Hearts: A Response to Andy Stanley', *Desiring God*, October 15, 2016 <<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/open-bibles-burning-hearts>> [accessed March 19, 2019]; See also Andreas J. Kostenberger, 'Editorial', *JETS* 62.1 (2019), 1-4; Stoyan Zaimov, 'Theologians Warn Andy Stanley's Message to "Unhitch" Old Testament is Heresy', *The Christian Post*, May 15, 2018 <<https://www.christianpost.com/news/theologians-warn-andy-stanleys-message-to-unhitch-old-testament-is-heresy.html>> [accessed April 8, 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Andy Stanley, Mark L. Bailey, Mark M. Yarborough, and Darrell L. Bock, 'The Relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament', *The Table Podcast*, Filmed October 16, 2018 <<https://voice.dts.edu/tablepodcast/old-testament-new-testament-relationship/>> [accessed October 16, 2018]; Kate Shellnut, 'Megachurch pastor ignites debate after suggesting that Christianity doesn't hinge on Jesus' birth', December 24, 2016 <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/12/24/megachurch-pastor-ignites-debate-after-suggesting-christianity-doesnt-hinge-on-jesus-birth/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.9f5ddda156b3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/12/24/megachurch-pastor-ignites-debate-after-suggesting-christianity-doesnt-hinge-on-jesus-birth/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9f5ddda156b3)> [accessed March 19, 2019].

<sup>9</sup> Andre Henry, 'Why Andy Stanley Thinks His Sermon Critics Should be more Curious', *Relevant Magazine*, May 15, 2018 <<https://relevantmagazine.com/god/andy-stanley-thinks-sermon-critics-curious/>> [accessed February 2, 2019].

<sup>10</sup> Stanley, 'Andy Stanley: Jesus Ended the Old Covenant Once and for All: A Brief Response to Robert Foster on my book, "Irresistible"', *Christianity Today*, October 19, 2018 <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october-web-only/andy-stanley-irresistible-response-to-foster.html>> [accessed February 2, 2019].

with Sam Collier.<sup>11</sup> Most recently, Stanley debated Pastor Jeff Durbin of Apologia Church (Mesa, Arizona) on *Unbelievable?* with Justin Brierley.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the criticism towards Stanley's apologetic method, the urgency presented in *Irresistible* is credible and relevant. Its release comes at a time in which secularism is rapidly growing in the West. Such growth has emboldened secularists to attack the authority of the word of God and shapes the worldview of the next generation that, consequently, make evangelism in the United States difficult. In this regard, *Irresistible* clearly identifies a major issue facing the church today. With that said, is Stanley's resurrection-priority apologetic methodology the best way to reach those within modern secular culture?

I am encouraged by Stanley's desire to reach the lost. Furthermore, there is certainly nothing unbiblical about modifying one's approach to preaching the gospel based upon the context. However, there are two significant problems with Stanley's apologetic method: (1) The relationship between the Old Testament and the gospel message is made undeniably explicit in the New Testament; and (2) The continuity between the Old and New Testaments makes the Old Testament essential for the doctrine and practice of the church.

## THE RESURRECTION AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH

The first theological issue addressed in *Irresistible* is the resurrection as the foundation of the faith. While evangelical Christians have assumed the Scriptures to be the foundation of the faith, Stanley is not convinced that this assumption is correct or effective when witnessing to those in the modern age. According to Stanley, this generation is best defined as 'post-Christian', a generation in which 'the majority have been exposed to Christianity (in our case, for generations) but are opting for a different worldview'.<sup>13</sup> The Christian faith is believed to be unscientific and ethically suspect. Stanley writes, 'They've concluded Christianity is ill-suited for the undeniable realities, both scientific and sociological, of the world

<sup>11</sup> See Sam Collier, 'Andy Stanley Shares About Clarity, Controversy and Irresistible Faith', *Orange Leaders*, February 4, 2019 < <http://orangeblogs.org/orangeleaders/2019/02/04/clarity-controversy-irresistible-faith> > [accessed March 3, 2019].

<sup>12</sup> 'Unbelievable? Should we unhitch Christianity from the Old Testament? Andy Stanley vs Jeff Durbin' *Unbelievable?*, June 1, 2019 <<https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Should-we-unhitch-Christianity-from-the-Old-Testament-Andy-Stanley-vs-Jeff-Durbin>> [accessed November 9, 2019].

<sup>13</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 269.

in which they find themselves'.<sup>14</sup> For those in a post-Christian culture, an authoritative and inerrant Bible is problematic and is frequently the target of ridicule from secular humanists, and particularly the New Atheists. This is no small matter for Stanley, who understands the implications of an errant Bible. He boldly asks, 'If the earth wasn't created in six days, why should anyone believe Jesus rose after three?'<sup>15</sup> While Stanley argues that the Bible can be historically verifiable in a 'controlled environment', it is 'not defensible in culture where seconds count and emotions run high'.<sup>16</sup> The problem, according to Stanley, is that believers try to defend the Bible from such attacks. He laments,

When scientific claims and archaeological discoveries threaten to undermine the credibility of the Old Testament, Christians often feel compelled to either rise up and defend the Bible or look the other way lest they see something that undermines their faith. Both responses are unnecessary and harmful. Both responses feed a false narrative regarding our faith.<sup>17</sup>

What, then, is the correct narrative? According to Stanley, the believer's faith does not rest upon a 'historically, archaeologically, scientifically accurate book',<sup>18</sup> but rather rests 'securely on a single unprecedented event – the resurrection'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the resurrection is so foundational to the faith that even if key Old Testament events never actually happened (e.g., a global flood, the exodus), 'it does nothing to undermine the credibility of our new covenant faith'.<sup>20</sup> This, according to Stanley, is the belief championed by the first-generation church. He argues, 'The first converts to Christianity did not believe Jesus rose from the dead because they read about it. There was nothing to read. They believed he rose from the dead because eyewitnesses told them about it'.<sup>21</sup> He concludes, 'The foundation of our faith is not an inspired book but the events that inspired the book',<sup>22</sup> and thus, 'Anyone who lost faith in Jesus because they lost faith in the historical and archaeological credibility of the Old Testament lost faith unnecessarily'.<sup>23</sup> Stanley is convinced that his resurrection-first,

<sup>14</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 268.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 265.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 314. See also p. 305.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 290.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 290. See also pp. 271, 306.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 321.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 306.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 294.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 315.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 290.

Bible-second apologetic method is both more effective in reaching those in a post-Christian culture who do not presuppose the authority of the Bible and helpful for those struggling in their faith.<sup>24</sup> Citing 1 Peter 3:15, Stanley argues, 'Every generation of believers must be prepared to explain their decision to follow Jesus *in* their generation *to* their generation out of concern *for* their generation'.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Stanley is convinced that, once an individual becomes a believer, he or she will become interested in the Scriptures.<sup>26</sup>

Of course Stanley is correct in asserting the importance of the historicity of the resurrection to the gospel message. This has always been the case. Its significance as a fact is attested in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 and by the Apostles' Creed. Many recent works have been written defending the historicity of the resurrection, and such defences lend support for the truthfulness of the faith.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, one can agree in part with Stanley that the historical verifiability of the Old Testament is not necessarily essential to the proclamation of the gospel message. Many gospel presentations make little to no reference to the Old Testament (e.g., the so-called 'Romans Road'). In addition, the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy acknowledges that a belief in inerrancy is not essential to salvation.<sup>28</sup> However, there are several serious difficulties with Stanley's insistence that the foundation of the faith is the resurrection and not Scripture.

### STANLEY'S FALSE DILEMMA

The first problem with Stanley's thesis is his creation of a false dichotomy. He argues that the Apostles decided to follow Jesus because of Jesus and not the Jewish Scriptures, as if the decision to follow Jesus because of the

<sup>24</sup> See Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 264.

<sup>26</sup> See Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 276.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004); Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Resurrection: A First-Century Investigative Reporter Probes History's Pivotal Event* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Article XIX of the Chicago Statement reads, 'We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and the church' (Norman Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 497).

resurrection somehow diminishes the importance of the Jewish Scriptures as foundational to the faith. Of course the Apostles followed Jesus because of Jesus! If Jesus was not who he claimed to be, and especially if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then the Apostles wouldn't have any reason to believe that he was the promised Messiah. That the Apostles believed in Jesus because they witnessed the Resurrection says nothing regarding the foundation of the Christian faith.

## ESTABLISHING THE CREDIBILITY OF THE RESURRECTION

A second major difficulty in Stanley's argumentation is the close relationship between the Old Testament predictions of Jesus' resurrection and the historicity and witness of the resurrection event as revealed in the New Testament. Jesus himself established this link twice. First, he argued to the disciples on the road to Emmaus that the prophets clearly predicted the suffering and resurrection of the Christ (Luke 24:25-27). Second, just prior to the ascension, he argued that his listeners were witnesses of the fulfilment of the law, prophets, and psalms concerning the resurrection of Christ (vv. 44-48). Peter also made the link between the Old Testament and the witness of the resurrection in his Pentecost sermon. Citing Psalm 16:8-11, he proclaimed that his listeners were witnesses of the Messiah's resurrection spoken through David's prophetic words (Acts 2:23-32). Likewise, Paul linked the resurrection with both its Scriptural prediction and its historic witness (1 Cor. 15:1-19). Clearly, Christ and the Apostles were not agnostic about the importance of the Old Testament and its relationship to the resurrection. Instead, they proclaimed that men and women witnessed the resurrection and its historicity and significance was anchored in Old Testament promises.

## PREACHING TO THE GENTILES

Stanley is aware of these passages and their use by his critics to critique his method. In response, he argues,

In a post-Christian context, our faith actually does better without old covenant support. This was not the case in the first century. And therein lies part of the confusion. The apostles appropriately leveraged the Old Testament to make their case to their Jewish brothers and sisters. But they typically did not leverage the Jewish Scriptures to make their case to the Gentile world.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 278.

To prove his argument, Stanley turns to Paul's witness to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34). Noting that Paul never cited the Old Testament in his preaching, Stanley concludes,

When preaching to non-Jewish audiences, audiences who did not view the Jewish Scriptures as authoritative, both Peter and Paul leveraged the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They put the spotlight where the spotlight needed to be – on Jesus and the resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

While it is true that Paul did not directly cite the Old Testament in his defence of the gospel message before the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, there are several problems with this argument.

First, it is fallacious to argue that Paul was not concerned with linking the Old Testament with the resurrection because he did not directly cite the Old Testament in preaching to these Gentiles. In fact, Paul did summarize the Genesis account of creation and referenced Adam (cf. v. 26), a point Stanley admits himself,<sup>31</sup> so it can hardly be argued that Paul was not concerned with the events recorded in the Old Testament. While it is true that Paul does not directly cite the Old Testament at Mars Hill, the speech is firmly based upon biblical revelation.<sup>32</sup> Paul's reasons for his avoidance of citing the Old Testament was likely due to the lack of familiarity the philosophers would have concerning the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup> Based upon the text of Acts 17 alone, Stanley can hardly make the claim that Paul's lack of Old Testament citation justifies his apologetic.

Second, Stanley's resurrection-first apologetics actually hurts the argument of *Irresistible*. Stanley is convinced that preaching the resurrection apart from establishing the truthfulness of the Old Testament is the key to reaching religious 'nones' and the de-churched, yet it was Paul's reference of the resurrection that ended the conversation at Mars Hill (v. 32). Apparently, while some of the pagans believed Paul's message (v. 34), other pagans were offended at or at least indifferent to the very thought of a resurrection. Ironically, the response of the philosophers is the exact opposite of what Stanley would have his readers to believe regarding the preaching of the historical fact of the resurrection.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 313.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 312.

<sup>32</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 335.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard N. Longenecker, 'Acts', in *Luke-Acts*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, revised ed., ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 983.



This brings Stanley's thesis to a serious difficulty. The resurrection clearly identifies the resurrection as a historically verifiable miracle (cf. 1 Cor. 15:4-9). However, readers of Matthew's Gospel are told that 'some were doubtful' even after witnessing the miracle of the risen Lord (Matt. 28:17). This response and that of the pagan philosophers should not surprise any student of Scripture. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the gospel message, including the resurrection, is 'foolishness to those who are perishing' (1 Cor. 1:18).<sup>34</sup> It is odd that Stanley would insist that the Christian faith does not rest upon the verifiability of Old Testament events and miracles while implying that the miracle of the resurrection is less susceptible to criticism. Those who reject the possibility of miracles *a priori* because of the demands of their worldview (e.g., the New Atheists and their followers) will, all things being equal, just as swiftly reject the resurrection as they would a six-day creation, a global flood, and other miraculous events recorded in the Old Testament. Stanley points to the witnesses of the resurrection as proof of the resurrection,<sup>35</sup> but key Old Testament events also claimed to have witnesses, for example, the exodus (e.g., Ex. 19:1-8; Deut. 1:19; Josh. 24:22), and Jesus and the authors of the New Testament assumed the exodus to be historically true (e.g., John. 3:14-17; 6:32; Acts 7:20-44; Rom. 9:15; 1 Cor. 10:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:7-18; Heb. 3:15-19; 12:18-25; Jude 5). What makes the exodus less believable than the resurrection? The existence and growth of the church alone does not give the historicity of the resurrection an edge over the historicity of the exodus, since the existence of the Jewish people in the land of Palestine could just as easily prove the exodus as the existence and growth of the church in the 1st century could prove the resurrection. In all of this, one is eerily reminded of Abraham's words to Lazarus: 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead' (Lk. 16:31). For Jesus, the Old Testament Scripture was as reliable as the fact of his resurrection.

## THE CONTINUITY OF SCRIPTURE

The second theological issue addressed in *Irresistible* is the continuity of Scripture. Stanley is convinced that the Old Testament frequently becomes a dividing line in evangelism and discipleship. He argues, 'What de-converts find impossible to continue believing eventually intersects with something *in* the Bible or something *about* the Bible. And when it's

<sup>34</sup> All Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Version.

<sup>35</sup> For example, see Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 298.

something in the Bible, the Old Testament is usually the culprit'.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, believers feel as though they must defend the integrity of the Old Testament, a defence that often includes the 'mixing and matching' of Old Testament and New Testament ethics.<sup>37</sup> However, according to Stanley, the careless mixing and matching of old and new covenant values and imperatives is an 'Achilles' heel for our post-reformation, sola scriptura version of faith'<sup>38</sup> and 'makes the current version of our faith unnecessarily resistible'.<sup>39</sup> Instead, believers must recognize the implications of the inauguration of the New Covenant, which was the total replacement of the Old Covenant and the 'significance of Jesus' new commandment – a single command that was to serve as the overarching ethic for his new movement'.<sup>40</sup>

To defend his conclusion, Stanley presents three arguments: (1) The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) abolished the Mosaic Covenant as the rule of faith and practice for the believer; (2) Jesus, Paul, and John base their ethical systems upon Jesus' New Commandment and not the Mosaic Covenant; and (3) The blending of Old and New Covenant ethics leads to gross doctrinal error.

## ACTS 15 AND THE OLD COVENANT

The decision made at the Jerusalem Council is a central motif to the argument of *Irresistible*. Stanley writes, 'The decision of the Jerusalem Council should have been the final nail in the mix-and-match coffin. From that point forward, the law of Moses was no longer the point of reference for how Gentile believers were to conduct their lives'.<sup>41</sup> Instead, the four imperatives commanded by the council (Acts 15:20) were given to facilitate peace and harmony between Jewish and Gentile believers.<sup>42</sup> Stanley's famous quote, 'The brother of Jesus said we shouldn't do anything that makes it unnecessarily difficult for people who are turning to God',<sup>43</sup> highlights the significance of this decision. For Stanley, the decision of the Jerusalem Council demonstrates that, like the first century church did for the Gentiles coming to faith, the twenty-first century church should not make it difficult for unbelievers to come to faith by removing the Old

<sup>36</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 278. See also p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 110.

<sup>38</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 71.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 124.

Testament as central to the faith and practice of the believer. However, there are two difficulties with using Acts 15 to defend Stanley's thesis.

First, Stanley makes the mistake of conflating the Mosaic Law with the Jewish Scriptures, or Old Testament. He writes, 'The Council's letter signaled a permanent break with the Jewish Scriptures as the foundation for orthopraxy',<sup>44</sup> and then one page later, 'The decision of the Jerusalem Council should have been the final nail in the mix-and-match coffin. From that point forward, the law of Moses was no longer the point of reference for how Gentile believers were to conduct their lives'.<sup>45</sup> Later, Stanley writes, 'Just accept the fact that everything in Exodus through Malachi, while fascinating, is not binding. It is not your covenant'.<sup>46</sup> While the entire Old Testament is sometimes called 'the law',<sup>47</sup> and while the Mosaic Covenant is central in Old Testament thought,<sup>48</sup> it is wrong to conflate the Mosaic Covenant with the Old Testament. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant given uniquely to the nation of Israel at Sinai following the exodus (Ex. 19:1-6) and is distinguished from what came before it (Deut. 5:1-3). Furthermore, the New Testament also distinguishes the 'Law', or Mosaic Covenant, from the rest of the Old Testament (e.g., Luke 22:44, in which Jesus identifies the 'threefold' classification of the Old Testament, i.e. Law, Prophets, and Psalms; and Matt. 22:40, in which Jesus identifies the 'twofold' classification of the Old Testament, i.e. Law and Prophets). While believers are not under the Old Covenant (cf. Rom. 6:14; 10:4; Gal. 3:15-4:7) but rather the Law of Christ (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:20-21), it is incorrect to associate the Mosaic Covenant with the Old Testament, as if the abolition of the Mosaic Covenant removes the doctrinal and practical importance of the Old Testament to the life of the believer.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 131.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> For example, see John 10:34, in which the Psalms are identified as 'law'.

<sup>48</sup> The centrality of the Mosaic Covenant to Old Testament thought is seen in multiple ways, including the importance of the Mosaic Covenant to Israel's kings (cf. Deut. 17:18-20) and the prophets' frequent use of the Mosaic Covenant as the standard by which Israel was judged (e.g., Dan. 9:11, 13).

<sup>49</sup> Stanley draws the same conclusion, and makes the same mistake, in his exegesis of Hebrews 8 (*Irresistible*, pp. 151-153). While the Mosaic Covenant is not the rule of practice for the believer, it is wrong to conclude that the Old Testament is obsolete because the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete. Furthermore, as will be documented below, even the author of Hebrews drew from the Old Testament to establish his ethics.

Second, Stanley does not effectively defend his position. It is worth noting that Stanley's interpretation runs contrary to most commentaries, which understand the source of the Jerusalem Council's decision to either be Leviticus 17-18 and its rules for Gentiles living under the Jewish state, or the Noahide laws of Genesis 9.<sup>50</sup> Of course, this does not make his position wrong, but it does create greater urgency for Stanley to defend his view, and it is unfortunate that he only interacts with scholars who hold to the former view. Regardless, even his arguments against the Leviticus interpretation are not convincing. His first argument contests the similarity between the decision of the Jerusalem Council's first, third, and fourth principles and Leviticus 17-18 based upon the fact that the latter contained a penalty for disobedience, but 'James did not include a penalty clause' in his decree.<sup>51</sup> However, as will be argued more fully below, the New Testament writers frequently borrowed ethical and moral principles from the Mosaic Covenant without including penalties for disobedience. His second argument concerns the second principle, the prohibition from sexual immorality. Here, Stanley contests that the definition of sexual immorality could not have derived from Leviticus 17-18 because the Gentiles would not have known Leviticus 17-18. Instead, Paul's ethic was derived from the character of Jesus, and not Levitical law.<sup>52</sup> However, critiques concerning the source of Paul's ethics aside (again, more will be said on this below), the same argument could be applied to Stanley's point: Why would Paul use Jesus as an example to Gentiles who had never heard of Jesus (e.g., Eph. 4:31-32; 5:1-3, 25; Phil. 2:3-5)?

Third, the use of Acts 15 undermines Stanley's insistence that the Old Testament does not contribute to Christian practice (or that the Bible is not foundational to the faith for that matter). In Acts 15:16-17, James quotes Amos 9:11-12 using the 'as it is written' formula (Acts 15:15), thereby proclaiming the authority of Amos.<sup>53</sup> James recognized the text as a divinely revealed revelation which had authority to resolve the problem faced by the early church regarding the application of the Mosaic Law. Just as the Old Testament is essential in establishing the credibility of the resurrection, so the Old Testament is essential in establishing the New

<sup>50</sup> For a survey of the various views on the Jerusalem Council, see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 2260-2269.

<sup>51</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 129, cf. pp. 203, 209, 214, 216.

<sup>53</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, 'Hermeneutics of Continuity', in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 102.

Covenant. An 'unhitched' Old Testament would hardly be an acceptable standard by which to settle the matter in Jerusalem.

## THE NEW COMMANDMENT AND THE OLD COVENANT

New Covenant ethics is another major motif of *Irresistible*. Stanley devotes an entire section of his work (section 3) to this theme. For Stanley, New Covenant ethics are based upon Christ and his new command for believers to love one another (cf. Jn. 13:34), not the Old Covenant. Referencing the Old Covenant, Stanley argues, 'Jesus issued his new commandment as a *replacement* for everything in the existing list',<sup>54</sup> and concludes, 'The imperatives we find scattered throughout the New Testament are simply applications of Jesus' new covenant command'.<sup>55</sup> To defend his argument, Stanley appeals to Jesus' 'reinterpretation' of Leviticus 19:18 in the Parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>56</sup> Paul frequently appealed to Christ and his example, and not the Old Covenant, as the standard for Christian living (e.g., Eph. 4:31-32; 5:1-3, 25; Phil. 2:3-5),<sup>57</sup> and John's teachings on love in his epistles (esp. 1 John 4:8) which, according to Stanley, 'redefined God for his readers and, ultimately, the world'.<sup>58</sup>

Stanley is correct in insisting the centrality of love as part of a Christian ethic, a truth taught by both Jesus and John. Furthermore, Paul's frequent appeal to Christ as the standard for Christian ethics. However, Stanley's solution to 'unhitch' the Old Testament from the believer's life and practice because of the secular critique of Scripture does not take seriously enough the continuity of Scripture and the historical debate concerning such continuity. While a full evaluation of this debate is impossible here,<sup>59</sup> several items are worthy of note.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 196.

<sup>55</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 200.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 180-191.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 203, 209, 214, 216.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 222.

<sup>59</sup> For a good survey of the key issues concerning the continuity of Scripture, see Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, eds., *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); G. K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); G., K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*; Richard B. Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1989); Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor Press, 2016); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,

First, Stanley misinterprets Jesus' use of Leviticus 19:18 in his Parable of the Good Samaritan to imply a strict discontinuity between the Testaments. Stanley rightly argues that the commands to love God and neighbour summarized the application of the Law.<sup>60</sup> However, seeking to explain the meaning of Leviticus 19:18, Stanley argues, 'Loving neighbor was code for loving other Jews'.<sup>61</sup> Stanley further suggests that the lawyer may have asked the question 'who is my neighbour?' in order to get Jesus to instruct his followers to love their enemies, which would mean non-Jews. This would cause the crowd to turn on Jesus because, presumably, such a command would offend the Jews because loving one's neighbour could not possibly mean anything else but fellow Jews.<sup>62</sup> Regardless, Stanley argues that Jesus took the opportunity 'to deconstruct and reconstruct audiences' concept of neighbor' to include Gentiles throughout the world.<sup>63</sup> However, it is incorrect to argue that the love for one's neighbour only extended to fellow Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant. In Leviticus 19:34, the Law requires the people of Israel to treat foreigners as they would a fellow Jew born among the people.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the importance of treating foreigners well is a consistent theme in the Old Testament and stood as a reminder to Israel of her time as foreigners in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:9; cf. Deut. 10:18; 24:17-19; Ezek. 47:22-23).<sup>65</sup> Of course, the extent of this love for neighbour was debated amongst the Jews in Jesus' day, with a tendency to lean towards a more restricted meaning of 'neighbour',<sup>66</sup> likely due to the struggle of the Jewish people to love others

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*The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); Stanley E. Porter, *Sacred Tradition in the NT: Tracing Old Testament Themes in the Gospels and Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 184. Paul draws the same conclusion in Romans 13:9.

<sup>61</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 185.

<sup>62</sup> See Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), pp. 202-203. Leviticus 19:34 uses a nearly similar Hebrew construction, לְרֵעֵךְ כָּמוֹךָ, וְאִתָּה בָּתָּה, as Leviticus 19:18, וְאִתָּה בָּתָּה כָּמוֹךָ.

<sup>65</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 134.

<sup>66</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), pp. 439-440. There is evidence that the Pharisees and Essenes did not even include all Jews among their 'neighbours'. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 444; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, Vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 316.

while living under Roman occupation. However, regardless of this debate, it is incorrect to argue that the Mosaic Covenant only extended grace to the Jewish people and that Jesus radically changed this ethic. Based upon the meaning of Leviticus 19, it is better to argue that Jesus was bringing out the full intention of the law through his use of the Parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>67</sup>

Second, Stanley incorrectly argues that Paul's ethics were based upon Jesus alone. While Pauline ethics frequently point to the example of Christ, Paul's works also include two of the most important texts relating to the continuity of Scripture. The most recognizable of these is 2 Timothy 3:16, which distinctly identifies the entirety of the Old Testament as 'inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness'. While the New Testament was beginning to become recognized as Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18; Luke 10:7; 2 Pet. 3:15-16), Paul's primary object in 2 Timothy 3 is the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>68</sup> ἱερὰ γράμματα, 'holy Scriptures', was used by Greek-speaking Jews to identify the Old Testament.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the Old Testament Scriptures were the writings Timothy could have known from childhood. According to Paul, the use of Scripture is for both doctrinal formulation and correcting improper behaviour.<sup>70</sup> Of particular interest is the last clause, πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, which is clearly a reference to the training of righteous behaviour.<sup>71</sup> As Towner concludes, 'The OT is equally effective for the task of imparting to believers an ethical framework for the observable dimension of life in community and society'.<sup>72</sup>

Stanley's response to 2 Timothy 3:16 is that Paul's use of the Old Testament is by way of 'illustration'. Stanley writes,

We should pay attention to how Paul used the Jewish Scriptures to teach, rebuke, correct, and train. Illustrations are scattered throughout his letters

<sup>67</sup> John Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 4 (Dallas: Words Books, 1992), p. 325.

<sup>68</sup> Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), p. 792.

<sup>69</sup> George W. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), p. 443.

<sup>70</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 570.

<sup>71</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 795-796.

<sup>72</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 592.

and his teachings as documented in the book of Acts...Paul never sets his application ball on an old covenant tee. When it came to how believers are to live, he was quick to point to Jesus as the standard.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, a study of Paul's letters indicates that this is clearly not the case. Perhaps the best example is found in Ephesians 6:1-3 and Paul's command for children to obey their parents. The command is drawn directly from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 and established as a New Covenant principle. For Paul, honouring one's father and mother would result in well-being and long life during the church age just as it did for Israel under the Old Covenant (Paul removes the clause 'which the Lord God gives you' because the land of Israel is not in view for the New Testament principle).<sup>74</sup> However, if Stanley's narrative is correct and no continuity exists, then why would Paul cite Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 in support of children obeying their parents? Ironically, Stanley argues that the command to honour one's parents under the Old Covenant was self-centred. Citing Exodus 20:12, he writes, 'Honoring Mom and Dad under the old arrangements wasn't really for the benefit of Mom and Dad. It was about the security and prosperity of the kids. This is the nature, force, and tone of the old covenant'.<sup>75</sup> Clearly, Stanley's conclusions are not consistent in this area.

Romans 15:4 is another significant passage relating to the continuity of Scripture. Here, Paul argues that 'whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction'. Since Paul cites Psalm 69:9 here, it is clear that he had the Old Testament in mind. The word διδασκαλία, 'instruction', is used in many places in the New Testament, and particularly in the Pastorals, to reference the importance of doctrine and teaching for the life of the church (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:10; 4:13, 16; 5:17; 6:3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:13; Tit. 1:9; 2:1, 7, 10).<sup>76</sup>

Like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Stanley also addresses Romans 15:4. He argues that Paul's use of the word 'instruction' means that the Old Testament is

<sup>73</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 168.

<sup>74</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 793.

<sup>75</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 235. The statement is also ironic based upon the way Jesus cited the Fifth Commandment in Matthew 15:3. While Jesus' primary concern was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes, he seemed to have the parents' interests in mind here more so than Stanley assumes.

<sup>76</sup> Note also the references in Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:22. While both references are to unsound doctrine, the importance of sound doctrine is implied in the statements and their contexts.



good for 'inspiration' but not 'application'.<sup>77</sup> At best, in Stanley's estimation, the Old Testament encourages the believer to persevere by observing God's story of redemption.<sup>78</sup> Of course, it is true that Romans 15:4 has the purpose of providing encouragement for the very reason Stanley gives.<sup>79</sup> However, Stanley's narrow definition of Paul's understanding of the applicability of Old Testament is incorrect. Paul's citation of Psalm 69:9 using the 'as it is written' formula in Romans 15:3 establishes the authority of Psalm 69:9 and provides the foundation for Paul's ethic in verses 1-2. In other words, Jesus' example of pleasing others is based upon the authority of Psalm 69:9. If Paul based his ethic upon Jesus' example, then why did Paul bother to cite Psalm 69:9? Commentators also frequently point to Romans 4:23-25 as an example of what Paul meant when he said that all Scripture is written 'for our instruction'.<sup>80</sup> Here, Paul notes that the words written regarding God's crediting Abraham with righteousness was 'for our sake also, to whom it will be credited' (v. 24). Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 to prove the continuity of the necessity of faith also proves that, while Genesis was written to a different audience in history, it was written for all believers for all time. This gives a clear example of the continuity of the Old Testament text and its direct relevance for the believer today.<sup>81</sup> Lastly, the careful reader will recognize the irony of Stanley's application of the Old Testament. Earlier, it was stated that Stanley argued that even if key Old Testament events never actually happened, 'it does nothing to undermine the credibility of our new covenant faith'. However, if that conclusion is true, then how could the Old Testament encourage suffering believers in the present? As an example, consider James's use of the perseverance of Job and the prophets to establish an ethical prohibition against complaining (Jas. 5:9-11). James identifies those who have endured, by implication the prophets and Job, 'blessed' (v.11), but can people who never existed and never experienced suffering be 'blessed'? Furthermore,

<sup>77</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 167.

<sup>78</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistles to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 869-870.

<sup>80</sup> Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 734; Robert Jewett, *Romans*. Hermeneia: A Critical & Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 880.

<sup>81</sup> It is interesting that Stanley leaves out Genesis in his definition of the Old Testament/Covenant documented above, and especially considering that the Genesis creation account is one of the issues sceptics have with the Old Testament. How would Stanley's apologetic handle this difficulty?

if their experience truly did not take place in time, then how is their perseverance and reward encouraging for those in the 'present'? While a fictional story can be inspiring, James parallels the experience of his readers, 'who have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings', with the 'endurance' of Job and the prophets (v.11). The consistency of God's workings in the past and 'present' to inspire James' readers only works if God's workings in the past actually happened. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that Job's experience, if untrue or uncertain, could encourage the readers whose experience was real. Stanley's insistence that sceptics do not have to worry about validating the Old Testament because it doesn't matter if the events recorded in the Old Testament happened, while at the same time arguing that believers are encouraged by the same events, is inconsistent.

In addition to these texts, Paul also cites or alludes to the Old Testament to establish an ethical principle. For example, Paul's prohibition on vengeance in Romans 12:19-20 is taken directly from Deuteronomy 32:35. 1 Corinthians 9:9 and its use of Deuteronomy 25:4 to support the financial support of pastors is another prime example.<sup>82</sup> Other New Testament authors frequently draw ethical principles from the Old Testament. Perhaps the most obvious example is found in 1 Peter 1:15-16. Here, Peter directly cites Leviticus 11:44-45 with the 'as is written' formula and bases Christian ethics upon the holiness of God, a principle first defined by the Old Covenant. Many other examples could be cited.<sup>83</sup> Stanley further argues that Paul 'did not attempt to harmonize God's behavior in the Hebrew Scriptures with the tone and teachings of Jesus'.<sup>84</sup> However, Paul did appeal to the Lord's 'behaviour' in the Old Testament as a warning for the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1-12), as do the other New Testament authors (2 Pet. 2:4-11; Jude 5-7; cf. Heb. 12:5-6).

Third, Stanley overstates his case regarding Johannine ethics. Commenting on 1 John 4:8, Stanley argues that '*God is love* is a uniquely Christian idea' whereas 'For Jews, God was holy. Separate. Unapproachable'.<sup>85</sup> This dichotomy Stanley brings out in his discussion of John is representative of the dichotomy he makes elsewhere between the activity of God

<sup>82</sup> See also 1 Timothy 5:18.

<sup>83</sup> Other examples in which an Apostle defines ethical conduct based upon an Old Covenant or Testament principle using the 'as is written' formula or equivalent include Rom. 12:8-9 w/ Lev. 19:18; Rom. 14:10-11 w/ Isa. 45:23; 2 Cor. 6:1-4 w/ Isa. 49:8; 6:14-18 w/ 8:13-15 w/ Ex. 16:18; Heb. 13:5-6 w/ Deut. 31:6 and Ps. 118:6; Jas. 4:6-7 w/ Ps. 138:6 and Prov. 3:34; 1 Pet. 3:8-12 w/ Ps. 34:12-16; 1 Pet. 5:5 w/ Prov. 3:34. While the context of the Old Testament passage is different, the Apostles do not use these passages as 'illustrations'.

<sup>84</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 162.

<sup>85</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 223.

in the Old and New Testaments. For example, Stanley insists that every pagan god during the Old Testament period was a 'human rights violator' and because of this environment God had to 'play by the rules of the day'.<sup>86</sup> Under the Old Covenant, God was so angry at sin that he drowned all the Egyptians, and self-righteous people use the actions and attitudes of God in the Old Testament to justify their self-righteousness.<sup>87</sup>

While Stanley is correct in pointing out John's emphasis upon the love of God, these conclusions do not accurately represent God in either Testament. God's love in the Old Testament is clearly emphasized through the biblical concept of (e.g., Gen. 19:19; 32:10; Ex. 15:13; 20:6; 34:6; Num. 14:18; Deut. 7:9; Ruth 2:20; 1 Kgs. 8:23; 1 Chr. 16:34, 41; 2 Chr. 7:3, 6; Ez. 3:11; Ps. 25:6; 33:5; 69:16; 86:15; 100:5; 106:1; Jer. 9:24; Lam. 3:22; Mic. 7:18), and witnessed in historical examples such as God's mercy upon Nineveh (cf. Jn. 4:11) and his refusal to take pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. Ezek. 33:11). God's wrath is displayed throughout the New Testament (cf. Jn. 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 2 Thess. 1:5-9; Jude 14-15; Rev. 19). One also wonders why God would not 'play by the rules' of Jesus' day, which was filled with the ethics of Greek and Roman paganism. However, more concerning, Stanley's comments come dangerously close to a Marcionite view of the Old Testament. While Stanley himself might not believe this, 'seekers' who read *Irresistible* with presuppositions against the Old Testament will likely interpret Stanley's comments in this manner.

Before proceeding to the final section of this paper, it must be said that the above arguments are not so naïve as to assert that the continuity of Scripture is a simple matter. The applicability of the Old Covenant is a very challenging area of biblical studies which the church has wrestled with for two millennia.<sup>88</sup> However, Stanley's 'unhitching' believers from the Old Testament and restricting the use of the Old Testament to 'illustrations' in response to secular criticism is not consistent with the practice of Jesus or the Apostles.

## CONSEQUENCES OF MIXING AND MATCHING

Stanley also appeals to what he identifies as the consequences of mixing and matching the Old and New Covenants. Stanley argues that the early church justified anti-Semitism by reinterpreting the Old Testament

<sup>86</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 163.

<sup>87</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 251.

<sup>88</sup> For a survey of approaches to the Mosaic Covenant in church history, see Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), pp. 32-48.

through their own Christological constructs,<sup>89</sup> as well as the Crusades by applying Old Testament commands.<sup>90</sup> According to Stanley, William Tyndale was executed because the Roman Catholic authorities relied on the Old Covenant as the standard for his punishment.<sup>91</sup> He even gives an example from his own ministry in which a modern white couple opposed their daughter's marriage to a black man because of Moses' marriage to a Midianite.<sup>92</sup> On a 'lighter' note, Stanley argues that bad church experiences, including self-righteousness, legalism and the prosperity gospel, come from such mixing and matching.<sup>93</sup> Stanley's words are conclusive: 'Whenever the church opts to mix old with new, bad things happen. People get hurt'.<sup>94</sup>

Stanley is absolutely correct in his insistence that some Christians have butchered the interpretation of the Old Testament by ignoring its historical context, and Stanley's argument serves as a reminder of the importance of proper biblical interpretation. For example, the couple's opposition of their daughter's marriage is clearly a misinterpretation of the implications of Moses's marriage (cf. Num. 12). However, the misinterpretation of the Mosaic Covenant or the Old Testament as a whole says nothing about what the Mosaic Covenant states on any given issue or its applicability to the believer today. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated above, the New Testament frequently appealed to the Old Testament in its establishment of ethics, and yet never endorsed self-righteousness or the other examples given by Stanley. These errors are satisfactorily resolved within mainstream evangelical applications of the Old Testament and thus do not justify Stanley's departure from such an interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

This response should give clear evidence that *Irresistible* is not able to defend its thesis. The early church distinctly and clearly linked the resurrection with the Old Testament. An abandonment of the Old Testament destroys the very foundation of the significance of the resurrection. Furthermore, Stanley's understanding of the continuity and discontinuity of Scripture is overly simplistic. While the application of the Old Testament is a challenging work, Stanley's apologetic is not consistent with the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament. While I applaud Stanley's

<sup>89</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 156.

<sup>90</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 88.

<sup>91</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 77-79.

<sup>92</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 148.

<sup>93</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>94</sup> Stanley, *Irresistible*, p. 78. See also p. 158.

desire to reach the next generation with the gospel, I cannot accept his method to accomplish this task.

If anything good can come from *Irresistible*, it is that it clearly reveals the urgency of the days and times in which we live. With culture pressing in on the church, a response is truly needed. However, a correct response to the rise of secular humanism and the appearance of a post-Christian society should be to increase our desire to teach men and women the word of God and how to defend the faith, not abandon either Testament.