

Christians, Don't Be Afraid to Hold Chick-fil-A Accountable

Chickens everywhere are rejoicing. Seems like a lot fewer Christians will be eating them and their friends at Chick-fil-A. When I first heard about the latest controversy, I thought, *Oh no, they've discontinued the waffle fries.* But it turns out that the internet is teeming with outraged pundits who believe the most holy of companies has lost its soul.

Apparently, the Chick-fil-A Foundation has ended donations to the Christian charities The Salvation Army, The Paul Anderson Youth Home and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Pressure from the LGBT community appears to be a factor. All the groups that are losing their Chick-fil-A funding have policies that don't support gay marriage. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee feels betrayed.

"In Aug 2012," Huckabee tweets, "I coordinated a national @ChickfilA Appreciation Day after they were being bullied by militant hate groups. Millions showed up. Today, @ChickfilA betrayed loyal customers for \$\$\$. I regret believing they would stay true to convictions of founder Truett Cathey. Sad."

Is that actually what they did? Current CEO Tim Tassopoulos responded, "When there is tension, we want to make sure we're being clear. We think this is going to be helpful." The foundation claims it will continue to support some Christian charities.

The question must be asked: Which Christian charities? Will only charities approved by critics and special interest groups be considered for funding?

I am sure Chick-fil-A executives crunched the numbers and

decided it was good business to drop these charities. I find it hard to believe, however, that they did not also consider why so many Christians showed up when Huckabee rallied the troops to support them. It was because the Christian community thought they had a friend in Chick-fil-A.

I eat at Chick-fil-A not because they are better than everyone else, though it's good food—I go partly because they have been a shining light in the darkness of a culture that is untethered from any moral compass. Perhaps Chick-fil-A didn't lose its soul; perhaps it sold its soul to the secular city.

The real story is not Chick-fil-A and the LGBT community. That is only a symptom of something much deeper that afflicts the Christian community and how it interfaces with the fast-changing culture in which we live. Chick-fil-A is not a church, but it reports to be a “Christian” company, and many of its leaders come from the church. The distressing truth is that the church is producing Christians who are managing to lose the culture. A gospel of “cheap grace” is actively diluting the strength of the gospel, and the faith that cheap grace engenders isn't resilient enough to stand up to the challenges that come calling.

The late great missionary statesman Lesslie Newbigin, in his great book *Foolishness to the Greeks*, said that there were three things a missionary encounter was not.

1. It was not a withdrawal from culture.
2. It was not a takeover of culture.
3. It was not appeasing culture.

A missionary encounter is, instead, to follow Christ's missional command to “make disciples.” The church does this by teaching people to count the cost of following Jesus, and then sending them into the various domains of society: government, schools, universities, the marketplace, the entertainment community, the arts, the media and sports. There they are to

deliver the gospel to the culture—to be the salt that preserves it and the light that illuminates it, and to call people into a life of following Christ.

I am afraid Chick-fil-A has forgotten this and has engaged in appeasement, which Winston Churchill defined as “hoping you get eaten last.” Newbigin called on disciples of Christ instead to confront culture—not meaning to be rude or hostile, but to speak up and stand up to the prevailing cultural winds and moods that run counter to the truth of God. Only when there is confrontation do you get converts, which Newbigin identifies as a sign of an authentic missionary encounter.

An authentic missionary encounter, born out of a gospel centered on discipleship and thus resistant to the allure of cheap grace, is also characterized by the identification of cultural idols. In this case, we might identify “compromise” (masked in the language of “tolerance”) as a cultural idol. Many Christians who are not steeped in a robust discipleship gospel think they can satisfy the beast that is progressivism, which worships another cultural idol—“progress,” and which won’t stop until it overtakes you and all you stand for. Ample evidence exists to show that compromise (and the appeasement it is masking) doesn’t work.

I predict that there will be more scrutiny, not less, of the decision made by the Chick-fil-A Foundation. I am sure the company will revise its response. More nuance will surely be forthcoming because of the nationwide backlash. Nuance, however, is what causes you to lose in politics, get defeated in war and get burned at the stake in religion.

I am not sure what Mr. Tassopoulos means when he says, “We think this is going to be helpful,” but I think we owe Chick-fil-A time to work this out, and even reconsider their decision. The foundation may be shocked by how many patrons will choose “In & Out” burgers over Chick-fil-A chicken because that feeling of affinity for them is gone, and

meanwhile the wheels of progress will have already moved on to another victim.

In the meantime, my advice to Christians who don't know what to do about the tanks of progressivism barreling down on them: Stand up and don't shut up. {eo}

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