

How World Vision Can Regain Trust

In the spirit of forgiveness that God Himself extended to us through Jesus, I believe we should accept World Vision's statement of repentance with graciousness and offer their leadership the forgiveness they requested, commending them for their contrition.

This could not have been an easy thing to do, as they will now have to deal with accusations of being double-minded, not to mention the pro-gay activist backlash they will surely face along with accusations that they were not sincere in their repentance but rather acted out of mercenary concerns, and so we need to be just as vocal in affirming them as we were in rebuking them.

The question is: Since they recognize that they deeply betrayed the trust of a large number of their constituents, how can they now regain that trust? (When speaking of World Vision throughout this article, I'm referring only to the U.S. branch, which made the initial, tragic decision.)

Not surprisingly, many are questioning the motivation of World Vision's reversal, suggesting that they did not act out of conviction but rather out of pragmatism, not wanting to lose a massive amount of donor support. Of course, World Vision could have said, "But our mission to help the poor depends on money, and when we realized that our initial decision to change our employment policy regarding homosexuality was going to hurt us financially, we decided to re-evaluate that decision."

But that is not what World Vision said (and, candidly, such a response would hardly be worthy of a purportedly Christian organization). Rather, their statement of repentance was unequivocal.

"We have listened to you," they said, "and want to say thank you and to humbly ask for your forgiveness."

They acknowledged that they "failed to be consistent with World Vision U.S.'s commitment to the traditional understanding of Biblical marriage and [its] own Statement of Faith."

And they explained, "We are brokenhearted over the pain and confusion we have caused many of our friends, who saw this decision as a reversal of our strong commitment to Biblical authority," claiming that this was "never the board's intent."

Further, they affirmed, "World Vision U.S. stands firmly on the biblical view of marriage."

In light of this apology, I believe it is important that we extend forgiveness and that we commend the leadership of World Vision for their act of humility and repentance. And certainly, we want World Vision to succeed, since they are doing something of great importance in the eyes of God and man—namely, helping the helpless.

The problem that World Vision faces now is that they lost the trust of many of their constituents. How can they regain that trust?

As someone wanting to help, not hurt, I humbly submit these questions to you, Mr. Stearns, and to the leadership of World Vision, in the hope that your organization will now demonstrate the reality of your corporate repentance. (The biblical expression is "to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance"; see Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:10-14; Acts 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.)

The questions that follow are direct, but they are not meant as accusations. Instead, they are intended to bring clarity, since there is tremendous disparity between the views expressed in the interview on Monday in *Christianity Today* and

the repentance statement released two days later. We really need to know where you stand if we are to be able to stand with you, and we do desire to stand together with you in ministering to the poor and the oppressed.

1) In your interview on Monday, with reference to homosexual marriage, you challenged the idea that "Scripture is very clear on this issue," responding with, "Well, ask all the theologians and denominations that disagree with that statement." In contrast, in your statement of repentance, you said, "World Vision U.S. stands firmly on the biblical view of marriage."

So, what do you actually believe? Many of us are genuinely confused. Are you now saying, "Although some churches may differ on this, we are reaffirming our strong belief that in God's sight, marriage is the union of one man and one woman, while homosexual practice is always against the law of God, even in the context of monogamous, homosexual unions"?

On Monday, did you feel that the biblical definition of marriage was debatable but on Wednesday decided that this was not the case? If so, what produced such a drastic change? Your clarification here would help to instill greater confidence.

2) Do you recognize now that your policy change actually was, in fact, an act of compromise and did, indeed, represent a serious slide down the slippery slope? (In your interview, you said, "We're not on some slippery slope. ... This is not us compromising.") If you do repudiate your earlier comments, would you be willing to state that clearly?

3) Since official organizational policies are of great importance, is anything stopping you from writing the biblical definition of marriage into your bylaws, committing to hold to this standard regardless of societal change and regardless of financial implications (the latter in the offhand chance that standing on Scripture will ultimately cost you financially)?

And since you speak of the shifting views of some churches on this subject, will you commit in writing to honoring God's Word even if the majority of churches associated with you apostasize from biblical standards?

4) Will you require all of your senior leadership to affirm the biblical definition of marriage? And since the voice of conservative evangelicals within World Vision was ignored or overruled as the policy announcement was being made, are you taking steps to win back the hearts of those who were offended?

On a personal note, in the late 1970s, when my pastor heard from World Vision about the plight of the Vietnamese refugees, he mobilized our church to sponsor these refugees (known as "the boat people"), and many of us, including my own family, opened our homes for several years to host these men, women and children. How precious those days were to all of us involved, and it was your organization that did so much to help us help them.

And on Monday and Tuesday of this week, I was flooded with messages from brokenhearted World Vision supporters, saying they were devoted to the children they were sponsoring but were now doing so with mixed emotions, planning to direct their giving to another organization once the promised sponsorship was completed.

Hearing the news of your repentance, some of them are thrilled while others still don't know what to think, and it is with people like them in mind that I encourage you to do what is needed to rebuild the trust.

All of us want the name of World Vision to shine brightly once again.

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