

World Vision and the Myth of Neutrality

World Vision recently changed its policy related to standards regarding the biblical lifestyle criteria for those they employ. After an outcry from the evangelical church, they now seem to be reversing their decision. Be that as it may, regarding their reason for the policy change to begin with, to quote World Vision President Richard Stearns:

“We’re not caving to some kind of pressure. We’re not on some slippery slope. There is no lawsuit threatening us. There is no employee group lobbying us. This is not us compromising. It is us deferring to the authority of churches and denominations on theological issues. We’re an operational arm of the global church, we’re not a theological arm of the church.”

This situation opens up a discussion related to the nature of a Christian ministry.

I believe Stearns and World Vision’s top board members still privately hold to the basic tenets of Christianity, including traditional marriage. Also, we cannot always hold any large Christian organization responsible for the personal, private lifestyles of their employees. We also have to make a distinction between charities that are run by Christians but are not a Christian entity, like World Vision.

However, in the case of World Vision, the leadership was making public, official policy changes and statements that directly contradict biblical ethics for Christians and that alter the nature of the gospel. I disagree that they did not go down a “slippery slope.” To me, the slippery slope began way before the debate over the nature of marriage and family. It began when World Vision began partnering with theologically liberal churches and denominations.

This makes us ask the question: What is the true church, and

what is a true believer?

If we are to merely go by the Apostles Creed as well as decontextualize basic salvation passages from the rest of the Bible, such as “for by grace you have been saved through faith ... not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8, ESV) as well as “If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9), then we can make a case that the body of Christ can include folks who adhere to various erroneous beliefs and practices regarding marriage, family and human sexuality, since salvation is not by works.

However, when we read the whole Bible, specifically the New Testament, we read passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

This passage makes it clear that those who have an intentional lifestyle of practicing sin without repentance will not inherit the kingdom of God and are not true believers—especially if they condone sin and don’t repent of it. Paul made it clear—“such were some of you”—thus making it clear that to him, the true believer isn’t still engaged in a deliberate lifestyle of immorality.

Furthermore, John states, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does

not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:4-6, 9-10).

Based on these and many other passages in both the first and second covenants, it is clear that organizations like World Vision cannot get off the hook with a claim of religious or Christian neutrality. They cannot cop out by saying they are not the "theological arm" of the church but just the "operational arm" of the church.

Any organization that wants to be expressed as Christian has to first and foremost go by the plain teachings of Scripture related to the nature of the gospel and to being a Christ follower. To put varying beliefs regarding baptism and women in leadership in the same category as the definition of biblical marriage and human sexuality is missing the point, as the New Testament apostles never listed diverging views regarding baptism and women in leadership as disqualifying when it comes to inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

World Vision cannot have it both ways. Either they are a Christian organization that follows the historic, orthodox teaching of Scripture or they are a humanistic organization that happens to partner with any organization, including any expression of the church.

I am sure World Vision started off the right way and has good motives and does great work. (I served on their NYC board for several years in the early 2000s and so, in the past, I aided their work in my great city.) As I already alluded, their problem began when they began integrating the nature of their organization with entities that do not uphold biblical standards. They have been unequally yoked and went down a slippery slope, which put them in a position to compromise the gospel.

All Christian organizations have to eventually make up their mind: Either they will be intrinsically Christian in nature and doctrine or they will be a humanitarian charity that is merely led by individual Christians and is not overtly Christian in nature and practice. They cannot have it both

ways!

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