

Living in the Book of Acts

An Apology for the SoldOut Movement's Five Core Convictions

“Don't believe me? Here's the test: Read the book Acts and tell me what Five Core Convictions you come up with.” Former Evangelist

Apologies or defenses of the faith have been common throughout Christian history. The word “apology” comes from the Greek word ἀπολογία (*apologia*) and means a verbal defense, in particular, in a court of law. **“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense (apologia)”** (Acts 22:1). Paul gave many *apologies*, for example, when defending the Christian faith to the Athenians (Acts 17), many of his letters are defenses of his apostleship and ministry. Christian apologies eventually took the form of well-written discourses and letters. Apologists abounded in the early centuries of Christianity such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and many others. This is where the word apologetics comes from, a defense of the faith. This article is an apology for the SoldOut Movement's Five Core Convictions:

1. We are a Bible church
2. We speak where the Bible is silent
3. The church is composed of sold-out disciples through discipling relationships
4. A central leader and central leadership
5. The evangelization of the nations in one generation.

“Core” is defined as the central or most important part of something while “conviction” is a firmly held belief or opinion. It should be said from the outset that these are not the core convictions of the Christian faith (the deity and incarnation of Christ, salvation is by grace through faith, etc.), but the core convictions of the SoldOut Movement. The core convictions of the Christian faith are what every baptized disciple in the movement studies in the Bible as outlined in our First Principles study series. The result is their salvation! We believe anyone who hears the message of Christ (Romans 10:17), believes the gospel (John 3:16), repents of their sin deciding to be a disciple (Acts 2:38, Matthew 28:18-20), is baptized (1 Peter 3:21) and is part of a fellowship that teaches these essential truths (Acts 2:41-42) is saved regardless of what fellowship. The issue of the SoldOut Movement Five Core Convictions is an issue of proclamation and not one of salvation (although these can have implications that effect salvation i.e. lukewarmness etc.). I am going to address the SoldOut Movement Five Core Convictions in an order they are not usually presented but that I think conveys the scriptural principles and heart behind why we believe they are essential for world proclamation.

Speak where the Bible is silent, be silent where the Bible speaks

Many of our detractors and those who have left the faith challenge the movement's convictions and yet none offer “a better way” to evangelize the world or are actually doing so. One former evangelist challenges to us to read the book of Acts and see if we find the SoldOut Movement's

Five Core Convictions and boldly claims they aren't there. The logic behind this statement is deeply flawed for many reasons. It assumes that because something isn't in the Bible or emphasized means it is wrong. I believe such conclusions are drawn out of hurt and lack proper biblical exegesis. If I was hurt by a youth minister, I may come to a conviction that the church shouldn't have a youth minister. I could boldly challenge you to read the book of Acts and say "look for a youth minister, you won't find it!" The fallacy of this logic becomes clear immediately. In fact, there are a lot of things you wouldn't find in the book of Acts. Consider this quote on the book of Acts from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's book *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*:

The crucial hermeneutical question here is whether biblical narratives that describe *what happened* in the early church also function as norms intended to delineate *what must happen* in the ongoing church. Are there instances from Acts of which one may appropriately say, "We *must* do this," or should one merely say, "We *may* do this"? Our assumption, shared by many others, is this: *Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e. obligatory) way- unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.* (Fee & Stuart, 2003)

The Mainline Church of Christ, in which we have our roots is deeply rooted in its "restoration" mentality. Growing up in the International Church of Christ (ICOC) where I became a disciple and graduating with my bachelor's in Biblical Studies from Oklahoma Christian University (former Portland satellite campus- Cascade) a Mainline Church of Christ college, I loved the idea of "restoring the 1st century church"! After seeing the fruit of this thinking in the Mainline Church and now the ICOC, I believe this "restoration" mentality, although noble, can hurt us theologically if not understood properly. Certainly we want to be the church of the Bible that Jesus started (Matthew 16:13-19) and yet when the *example* of the early church found in Acts becomes binding law, we miss the purpose of the book of Acts that Luke was writing to show us (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The Mainline Church of Christ's mode of Bible interpretation that Thomas Campbell coined was *to speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent*. This phrase was twisted to mean if the Bible says something we have authority to do it, but if it is silent it must be forbidden. This led to legalism and the forbidding of musical instruments, women baptizing, etc. There had to be a command, example, or inference to do something in the church. This teaching is still predominate in many of our detractors although they will not go to the Mainline Church of Christ; they espouse the ideas such as only meeting in houses for service, only taking benevolence type collections, and in extreme cases, not celebrating holidays. Their challenge to us is "where is that found in the book of Acts?" With this theology they would be correct in many instances, but they are then faced with a challenge; how far do you go with this thinking? Does a true Christian need to dress the same way the early Christians did? Does a church service need to go through midnight? (Acts 20:7-12) Do we need to put money at the church leader's

feet instead of in a basket or plate? (Acts 4:37) Certainly, these things aren't wrong but are they necessary? How far do you go "restoring" the book of Acts? This type of theology has been the most divisive, as even those who think like this can't agree on how much is to be restored. It is a black-hole *letter of the law* theology that leaves the soul empty and looking for the *life of the Spirit*.

We must instead be silent where the Bible speaks, and speak where the Bible is silent. If the Bible commands something, we are to be silent and obey what God says. Where it is silent we have the freedom to come up with methodologies prayerfully based on biblical principles that propagate God's purposes. This is true biblical restoration.

A dear friend of mine who left the SoldOut Movement recently asked me if church leaders can give commands from the pulpit that are opinions and not scripture. Isn't this what is done every Sunday in any church when the announcements for the week are given? An announcement is made that Midweek service is going to be Wednesday at 7:30pm. Isn't this an opinion and not a biblical mandate? Hebrews 13:17 is in the Bible for this very reason: ***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you.*** Biblically, leadership has the authority to speak where the Bible is silent (see below "*Central leader and a central leadership*").

Leaders bring unity and direction to God's people. A lot of ministry is not necessarily right verses wrong, but sometimes good, better, or best. Leaders must speak where the Bible is silent for the congregation or there will be disorder and chaos. In a family the dad may make a decision that isn't the best for the family but everyone gets behind it. This was done in the early church by James who spoke where the New Covenant was silent, if you will, by commanding the whole movement to abstain from food polluted by idols. (Acts 15:19-21) It was made authoritative in the form of a letter and the letter was taken to the churches for them to obey. (Acts 16:4)

Bible church not just a New Testament Church

James and the apostles understood that the law (the Old Testament) were the scriptures for the first century church! If you lived in the time the book of Acts was written, the Old Testament was your Bible! You would have understood the sacrifice of Christ took away the Mosaic Law (sacrificing animals, temple worship, etc.) and yet you would know the Old Testament could be used in your discipleship. Paul wrote concerning the Old Testament to the evangelist Timothy, ***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The physical nation of Israel foreshadowed spiritual Israel, which is God's church. This is why not much needs to be said about leadership structure in the book of Acts as it was already written about in their Bible. The plea to "restore the New Testament church" is misleading if not understood in a theologically correct way. We are to be a Bible church.

To speak where the Bible is silent is part of the glory of our freedom in Christ. God in his genius understands that every culture and time period is different so of course examples in scripture couldn't be exclusively binding. A certain way the church did things in Acts may not be the best way in today's culture. In some cases, it may be. A curious quick reading through the book of Acts will show the leadership structure changed and molded according to the needs as they were free to speak where the law was silent. We are free to choose how to do missions, how to spend money as a movement, how to structure our ministries, etc. The book of Acts is then not a book on church polity or structure, but a book showing the geographical expansion as the Spirit moved the disciples to evangelize the world in their lifetime.

Evangelization of the Nations in One Generation

The theological purpose of the book of Acts is outlined in the beginning by Luke in Acts 1:8, ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*** Acts chronicles the early movement's expansion to the ends of the earth: Acts 1-7 (Jerusalem-Judea) Acts 8 (Samaria) Acts 9-28 (ends of the earth/Gentiles). Luke's interest is to show how a Jewish based community became a world-wide Gentile movement by the power of the Spirit. We are to evangelize the world in this generation. This doesn't mean everyone will become a disciple, but that everyone needs the chance to become one by encountering God's church and hearing the message. This was the command of Jesus to the eleven faithful disciples in Matthew 28:19, ***Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*** Jesus commanded those eleven to get to all nations. How could they unless they do it before they die (their generation!). A recent analogy lead evangelist of the City of Angels ICC, Tim Kernan, used at a staff meeting demonstrates this point. If I am a parent and I tell my kids to make their bed and clean their room, wouldn't it be foolish if they questioned if I meant in their generation. Of course it means in their lifetime! I am very surprised that anyone would think such a noble vision is unbiblical. I believe personally that someone who fights against this vision from Jesus to evangelize the world in our generation is very far from God and something is going on in their heart.

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, ***And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*** "The end" in context (Matthew 24:1-2) refers to the destruction of the temple by the Roman general Titus that would occur in 70 AD. Jesus taught the world was going to be evangelized in their generation before the temple was destroyed. Luke uses Acts 1:8 to reiterate Jesus' command and chronicles the church from its beginning in 29 AD, to accomplishing its motivating vision. Paul would later write around 61 AD from Rome under house arrest in the book of Colossians 1:23, ***This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*** They accomplished the evangelization of the known world in their generation, and then in 70 AD the temple would be destroyed fulfilling Jesus' words.

After Jesus' commission to go into all nations he told the eleven faithful with their new baptized disciples to be *teaching them to obey everything I have taught you*. (Matthew 28:20) We are to teach every disciple in this generation to accomplish the mission to evangelize the world in our lifetime.

Some have been concerned that this puts too much pressure on the disciples. This pressure is not put there by man but by God. Often the "message" of the Lord in the KJV of the Bible is called the "burden" of the Lord. (i.e. Malachi 1:1) The world is lost and it is an incredible weight we must carry as followers of Jesus. This burden, pressure, and weight should motivate us to make a difference. If I came home to my apartment burning down and my wife was passed out inside, there is going to be a "pressure" or "burden" to run in and get her. This is not an ungodly pressure, but a pressure motivated by love to save my wife out of that burning building. The world is burning in their sin, lost, and we must embrace the pressure at whatever cost emotionally, financially, or personally to see the world evangelized. Paul even was willing to suffer spiritually for this cause (Romans 9:1-2), a man who *faced daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches*. (2 Corinthians 11:28) If we are to be living in the book of Acts, we must be a church that is a world-wide movement expanding to the ends of the earth.

Central leader with a central leadership

Living in the time the book of Acts was written would reveal to us that the churches worked together and were not locally autonomous (self-governing) congregations. They clearly shared money to support staff (Acts 18:5) and meet benevolent needs (Acts 11:29-30). Acts 15 clearly reveals a central leadership that governed and preserved unity in the world-wide church.

God's SoldOut Movement is structured with a central leader (Kip McKean) and a central leadership (the World Sector Leaders and Crown of Thorns Council). Is there biblical precedence for this structure? Before we look into that I want to remind us that this question assumes there *has to be* biblical precedence for a leadership structure which argued earlier is not the case. We do believe though where the Bible is silent we should do our best to base what we believe off scriptural principles and the spirit of scripture. Yet, as you dig in your Bible I believe you will find there is much biblical precedence for this leadership structure. Though Acts is not a book on church polity, you will find clues for how the church functioned. Before we do, let us go back to the Old Testament and see what those living in the book of Acts would have read in their Bibles (Old Testament). Here are a few passages to consider:

"Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide

themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” Exodus 18:19-23

“Moses said to the Lord, “May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” Numbers 27:15-17

God commanded Moses to lead the people but also to appoint men who fear God to lead thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moses was the central leader and those men would form the central leadership. In the New Testament we see Paul is able to send an evangelist (Timothy) into a church as he oversaw that congregation he planted (1 Corinthians 4:14-17). This established the *same teaching everywhere in every church*. Titus was the overseeing evangelist (historically bishop) of Crete and was told by Paul to go appoint shepherds in every church in Crete (Titus 1:5). Moses was then to make sure that there would be a central leader after he passed (Joshua) so the people would not be like sheep without a shepherd.

The early Christians understood that anytime God’s people were united and prospering there was a central leader (Moses, Joshua, David, Jesus and the Apostles, etc.). Central leadership is at the very core unit of the human family. Isn’t the father the central leader of his family? Don’t businesses have a CEO or boss? Doesn’t a sports team need a coach? In fact, most autonomous churches believe in one-man leadership to some degree (the pastor, or lead evangelist), yet the logical fallacy is that they don’t believe in it for a world-wide movement.

Fear cannot motivate us to compromise biblical commands and principles. Sadly, if a wife experiences an abusive husband, it does not mean the problem is with the structure of marriage, rather the sin in that man’s life. A godly husband will, in fact, solicit input from his wife and children, delegate responsibilities to them, choose to submit to their wisdom at times, and yet he will make the final decision.

I’m so grateful for Kip McKean who through grace and truth leads God’s SoldOut Movement. Personally, I had the opportunity to be discipled by Kip and work in the inner workings of this incredible movement at various times. I have seen Kip take correction and solicit input. He has always apologized and owned up to mistakes he has made and at the same time boldly recognizes his call to lead God’s people. It should be said, we do not believe in a Pope where the man stands above God’s word, but believe in a leader who submits himself to God’s word. Even in the Jerusalem Council meeting of Acts 15, the central leadership defers to God’s word on the subject they are discussing. Kip has said countless times in sermons he “does not hear the audible voice of God” but strives his best to live as Jesus did and hear his voice through scripture like all of us. Personally, I have never met anyone who is as close to Jesus in their personal example, in the grace he shows, in the discipline of his life, and his vision to win the world. As

Jesus said, whoever wants to be great must be a slave of all and this is why he is leading our movement. God determines his leadership (Acts 20:28).

The question inevitably always comes, who was the one-man leader in the New Testament? Our detractors want a point blank verse from the book of Acts that says something like “Peter was the leader of God’s entire movement”. They are unwilling to submit to the abundantly clear passages in the Old Testament because of their “New Testament” only theology. Also they are unwilling to allow creative structure or paradigm based off Old Testament principle to become authority since they believe “be silent where the Bible is silent” (for them- where the New Testament is silent). The most obvious example of one-man leadership is in Jesus Christ who founded the church (Matthew 16:13-19). I will attempt to answer this question of who led the first century movement, even though scripturally this is not the purpose of the gospels and Acts since they were built upon the foundation of the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus was one man and is the ultimate example should be enough of an example for us as a church today to believe in one-man leadership.

It is my personal conviction that Peter was the leader of God’s first century church movement after Jesus ascended to Heaven. The fact that Catholics believe Peter was the first Pope should not be dismissed so quickly by Protestants. Unfortunately, the Mainline Church of Christ reacted so much to the Catholic’s false doctrine that they decided autonomy was the rule of church government instead of really searching the scriptures and as seen already, their own theology defeated them. Peter or the central leader is not above scripture as the Catholics teach, and cannot make doctrine for the church since Jesus and His word are the foundation (Ephesians 2:18-20), but consider these facts from scripture that show Jesus chose him to be the central leader for the first century movement:

- 1) Peter is always listed first in the list of apostles (Matt. 10:1-4- “first” is used of Peter, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, Acts 1:13)
- 2) Peter usually spoke on behalf of the apostles (Luke 9:32, Luke 12:41, John 6:68-69)
- 3) It would be Peter’s faith that would strengthen the brothers (Luke 22:32)
- 4) Peter was asked by the resurrected Jesus “Do you love me more than these (referring to the other apostles by some scholars)?” He then preceded to tell him to feed his sheep. Peter was to feed all of Jesus’ sheep, to shepherd Jesus’ people! (John 21:15-17)
- 5) Peter lead the meeting to replace Judas with Mathias. (Acts 1:15-26)
- 6) Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and this is fulfilled when he preached the first gospel message at Pentecost. (Matthew 16:13-19, Acts 2:36-42)
- 7) It was Peter who received the revelation to allow the Gentiles to accept the gospel. (Acts 10-11) (Brom, 2004)

Acts 15 is the Jerusalem Council where the central leadership of the early church (the apostles and elders) come together to discuss a controversy in the movement. Evidently some Jews were

teaching that to be saved you must be circumcised, and a meeting was called to resolve the issue by the Jerusalem Church. It is obvious at this point that James (the brother of Jesus) is leading the Jerusalem Church and makes the final verdict (Acts 15:19). What happened to Peter as the leader? Well this is where things get a little unclear but might I present an alternative view.

Peter had left leading the Jerusalem Church when he was miraculously delivered from prison and fled to another place. Acts 12:17 says, ***Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.*** We can assume Peter put James in charge of the Jerusalem Church. It is possible that he was placed in charge of the movement, but I personally believe Peter still led the entire movement even after this point. A careful reading of Acts 15 reveals Peter came back to Jerusalem for the council meeting and it could be argued that he actually leads the council meeting. Peter is the one who stands up and addresses the council after some beginning discussion (Acts 15:6). When James speaks up, he defers to what Peter (“Simon”) says as authority (Acts 15:14). James then simply expresses his judgment resulting in a letter written for all the churches to obey. It is Peter who is called an Elder and mentions Jesus being the “Chief Shepherd”, could this be an inference to his own role? (1 Peter 5:1-4)

A modern parallel is our current structure. Kip has “left LA” to assume the role of traveling to strengthen and start churches just as Peter left Jerusalem. Kip left Tim Kernan in charge (like Peter left James) of the Los Angeles Church. It would be fitting if there is a Central Leadership Council meeting in LA that Tim would host the group and defer to Kip’s decision in his final judgment. History says that Peter went on to lead the church in Rome (called “Babylon” figuratively in 1 Peter 5:13) which influenced the entire movement of God being the lead city. It should not surprise us then, that the early church saw Peter as the overall leader, and sadly with the false doctrine of the third century, eventually a Pope. Just because they twisted his role doesn’t mean we should do away with “one-man central leadership” that is taught clearly in the Old Testament and now we see even in the New Testament.

Leadership is of God and to be obeyed in the churches (Hebrews 13:17). We have seen they speak where the Bible is silent in areas that provide unity and direction for the church. It should go without being said, you don’t obey a leader who calls you to go against biblical commands. Leadership is to teach and preach the Bible with all authority and expect people to obey. This is done through humility, love, patience, and faith.

Special Missions Contribution is an amazing concept our leadership has come up with to evangelize the world and plant churches. Some have said this puts too much pressure on the churches and why can’t Christians just meet in homes like they did in the book of Acts while not paying their preachers. The question must come why did they meet in homes in the book of Acts? Did they have access to hotel rental spaces such as we do? Maybe they did not think of it since Christianity started as a house church movement. Maybe they did meet in places besides

homes (Acts 19- the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus, Acts 2:42-27 temple courts, etc.). My point is the leadership chose to do it a certain way and the people were behind them. Wouldn't God want us to use the resources we have to accomplish his mission (Ephesians 5:16)? Jesus said you must judge a tree by its fruit (Luke 6:44). Sadly, our detractors who have so loudly proclaimed a "return to New Testament Christianity" through the meeting in homes exclusively, not paying ministers, no central leadership, etc. have had minimal impact and ARE NOT "living in the book of Acts" evidenced by their lack of geographic expansion. By contrast, the SoldOut Movement in 8 years has expanded to every populated continent of the world. There is nothing wrong with meeting in homes or not having full-time staff, but we have decided as a leadership that the fastest way to accomplish the mission of Christ is to imitate the example of Jesus who had a full time staff (Mark 1:14-20, Luke 10) and invest most of our money into starting and maintaining new churches and their leadership (1 Corinthians 9:14).

The Church is Composed of Sold-Out Disciples through Discipling Relationships

A godly central leader and central leadership will call the churches to be completely sold-out to Jesus Christ. (Matthew 13:44-45) Every baptized disciple has given up everything in order to follow Jesus (Luke 14:25-33). After one is baptized, that new disciple is commanded to be taught to obey by another disciple (Matthew 28:20). There are around 59 "one another" verses in the Bible; *love one another* (John 13:34-35), *confess your sins to one another* (James 5:16), *carry each other's burdens* (Galatians 6:2), etc. In order to obey Jesus' command and fulfill the one another passages, the leadership of the SoldOut Movement has decided that every Christian will have a discipling partner to encourage them in their walk with God. Just as churches aren't autonomous and need outside authority to help guide and encourage one another, so Christians need others to disciple them.

Where does one find "discipleship partners" and "Bible Talk Leaders" in the book of Acts? Did potential baptisms really need to "count the cost" before getting baptized? The gospel of Luke is a narrative that contains the teachings of discipleship and what it means to be "sold-out" to God (Acts 1:1), while the book of Acts is a narrative of the results of those very teachings! We are not privy to all the information covered when for example Philip studied the word with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:29-36). We can assume that Philip covered with him some of the teachings of Jesus that Luke covered in his gospel (Acts 1:1). Jesus commanded that everyone count the cost before their baptism (Luke 9:57-62 & 14:25-33) and certainly the Eunuch did this or Philip wouldn't have baptized him.

Those who oppose the idea of a movement of churches, have brought up the idea of "who disciplined the Ethiopian Eunuch?" Similar sentiments are given when they bring up church history which says the Ethiopian Eunuch started the church in Ethiopia without any direction or outside authority. Scripture will not contradict scripture. If this tradition is true, we can confidently assume the Eunuch went back to the Jerusalem Church or one of the churches of the

Acts 8:1-4 scattering to be a part of the church, get trained, and eventually sent off to Ethiopia commissioned by the church.

The early church account in Acts in its unadulterated beginnings was completely sold out to Christ. The 3000 baptized in Acts 2:41 were indistinguishable from the 120, who were indistinguishable from the original 12, who were indistinguishable from Jesus Christ! Discipling is the only way to reach the ends of the earth. Someone once said it is the glue of the movement. Looking at the SoldOut Movement's Five Core Convictions under the light of the Word of God, it is strange to think many would not accept these teachings. We cannot be deceived, the root issue is not the teachings of the convictions, but the heart of the men and women who oppose them.

We have seen so many miracles, but many of us have had friends and even a few fallen evangelists who have renounced the SoldOut Movement's Five Core Convictions and left the church. The truth is being a part of a movement takes incredible sacrifice. The convictions themselves require us to practice the qualities that please God: humility, faith, submission, and trust. We are more susceptible to hurt in a true church of God that is really family because we are so close to one another, unlike most churches that go from Sunday to Sunday. In every case that a leader has left the movement, I have noticed it has boiled down to them not getting what they wanted. Whether it was a leadership position they desired, whether it was that they were asked to send people to another church, whether it was they felt that the Special Missions Contribution being asked was too much, it all came down to them having to give up something.

I do not look down on these fallen men and women as they simply gave into the sins so common to men and it should be a sober reminder for all of us to stay humble. Personally, I am not a part of the World Sector Leaders group or Crown of Thorns Council. I am an evangelist called by God living my dream preaching the gospel in the small town of Gainesville, Florida. As of this writing our church has been around a little over two years and has sent out around 15 disciples to strengthen other congregations. In June we will be sending out 12 more in one month and the congregation is 68 members. This is not to boast as we are far from what we need to be for God, but leading a small church and having to send out some of your top leaders can be really tough. Of course autonomy and a rejection of the Five Core Convictions appeals to the one not close to God or disconnected from the mission when such calls are made. It is funny, it isn't the church that really struggles, they understand disciples are sold-out to Jesus. It is the leaders of the church that struggle. What gets us through this sacrifice? Personally, through discipling and the example of Matt and Helen Sullivan, we know God will provide no matter what is asked. The Orlando Church they lead has only been around a little over 3 years and they planted both Gainesville and Houston sending their top leaders; yet, God has taken care of them as they just recently broke 100 disciples! We realize we are one global church. It is more blessed to give than to receive, the Lord said. There is no cost too high financially or physically, that God could ask us for the salvation of just one soul. Jesus submitted to God, even to the point of death.

Bottom line, many leaders who have left God’s movement simply didn’t get what they wanted, and then changed their “convictions” to appease their conscience and validate their wants that were supposed to be given up at baptism. An evangelist that is not experiencing growth compromises conviction by not baptizing disciples (John 4:1-2) anymore and now doesn’t feel people need to “jump through so many hoops” to be baptized. Another church leader doesn’t want to give up someone to another church and so now begins to question central leadership while autonomy is all the more appealing. Another is tired of the financial sacrifice to support foreign missionaries and so once again autonomy becomes all the more appealing. This lack of submission leads to a bitterness towards God’s movement that defiles many as they publically criticize it while shipwrecking the faith of many (Hebrews 12:15). It shipwrecks those who listen because their pleas appeal to the sinful nature to not have to be surrendered to God. This bitterness drives them usually into strange doctrines, anything to be different from the movement’s theology. Our prayer is that many of our fallen brothers and sisters will come back to their senses and join us in evangelizing the nations in our generation.

To address the challenge, the former evangelist gave: “*Don’t believe me? Here’s the test: Read the book Acts and tell me what Five Core Convictions you come up with.*” We have seen from the Bible that the book of Acts is a narrative showing the *results* of biblical convictions not the *doctrine* behind them. Regardless, we did look into Acts to see if we could find them and found plenty of examples. The whole basis of his challenge falls short in light of simple logic and the precepts of God’s word. It is my prayer that this apology helps our detractors consider their ways, but even more strengthens the convictions of disciples all around the world in God’s SoldOut Movement and our Five Core Convictions! To God be the glory.

Evangelist,

Mike Patterson

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