

## **Steve Johnson Apology**

I'm here tonight to confess sins and to apologize. And to be rebuked. I'm here to listen and to submit to you.

For the past month I've heard the heart rending testimonies of hundreds of disciples and I'm sorry for failing you as a leader.

I have read Henry Kriete's letter and countless others and confess the convictions I now have for the following sins:

I built a hierarchical order of leading in the Lord's church.

In our worldwide fellowship I was a World Sector Leader. I assumed the job of evangelizing 1/5 of the world. I allowed the role of World Sector Leader to become an office not found in the bible. I believe the office ultimately conflicted with what the bible teaches about local church government.

I am ashamed and sorry and beg God's forgiveness and yours.

I wore the title Lead Evangelist. Instead of training and teaching local men how to serve as elders and shepherd the flock I strongly asserted my leadership and opinions. I did not invite opposing views and in fact sometimes maligned them. I became a man "hard to say "NO" to" and believed I was right. I believed I was united with my brethren but in reality many were afraid to speak the truth to me. I'm ashamed, sorry, and humiliated that I've fostered such an environment and embarrassed that it took so long and such turmoil to shut up and listen.

I have become painfully aware that under my leadership we had at least two churches going on at the same time...the Leader's church and the Member's church. That's what division between clergy/laity is.

I am so sorry to all of you. I do not claim to "get it" yet. But I do know that I perpetuated a hierarchy that seldom rewarded those trying to alert me to what my leadership was causing. I was a fool and I am sorry.

This became a little clearer to me when I understood that I need to repent of misusing and abusing statistics, the ABCs of ministry...Attendance, Baptisms, and Contribution.

This realization is another reason I feel solely to blame for so much of your hurt.

I used stats to push you to bring visitors, baptize people and get the contribution.

If you had a bible talk leader push you on any of these as well as quiet times or other things we considered to be part of a Christian's obligation, then please understand this is why I am totally to blame for the legalistic, Phariseeism in the church. Your leaders

were simply doing to the best of their ability what they thought I expected. It all began with my instruction. I am the one at fault.

In my pride I arrogantly thought that I was right. One of the first scriptures we teach someone becoming a disciple is Proverbs 16:25...There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death. I thought I was right.

You were coerced to give money and do many things that disciples do in Christian liberty but my leadership turned it into a burden and broke many of your hearts. I don't know yet how to live with that.

I am sad and sorry that I've broken your trust and that it's caused you to mistrust others who have loved you, tried to protect you, labored hard and honestly among you.

I am sorry to the elders. Sam has always tried to speak the truth to me and I've been hard to deal with.

Dale and Sherwin have always been more focused in their local ministries. They were not seen as "congregational elders" but "local" or "regional" elders. I have let them down and they have only tried to help. Please forgive me.

I am sorry to the young couples who I put into leadership in Manhattan ( and elsewhere in the church, especially Brooklyn). I led their discipleship group all last year. They were trying to do as they were taught and still often would be conflicted between what I said and what they saw going on in the church. It was my mistake to put so many of you under such young leadership. Blame me, not them. They did work hard for you. I don't know how to deal with the pain I feel for having hurt such young hearts or for having placed all of you in a position where you felt so disregarded and disrespected. It was all my fault. I am so sorry.

I am sorry to all the sisters and brothers with deep emotional issues which I've been so insensitive to. I've said things that are now humiliating to remember. I'm ashamed. I'm so sorry.

I am sorry to all the women and men who have given their lives to work in church administration. One of the only things I disagree with Henry Kriete's letter about is in the area of finances. Or more directly, I disagree with the way some have interpreted the broad strokes of his letter to incriminate ACES administration or NYC church of Christ administration. Tonight is a night to apologize not to explain. But I long as much as any of you for our finances to be clear to you. There has been no misappropriation of funds. You may disagree with the wisdom of some decisions. But mistrust in me has cast a shadow on honest Christians who should be lauded not suspected. There is nothing to hide but in the turmoil I've caused you've lost trust in me and your church office is now smaller, harder worked, harassed, and all the while conscious of the fact that they soon may be unemployed. No one would want to work under the conditions they're facing.

I beg their forgiveness and yours that my broken trust has caused you to mistrust brethren who have done no wrong.

You have questions and I'd like to answer them but I understand now is a time for me to say nothing except for what I repent of.

But I own a website named after my grandfather, [www.UncleScrub.com](http://www.UncleScrub.com)  
Beginning this week I will try to answer some of the questions I've been hearing. I know my credibility is questionable for many of you. But I will try to do my part and share what I've seen happen in our fellowship these past two years. Also, I received permission today from Henry to put his letter on this site. I encourage anyone who has not read it yet to please read it.

When I spoke to the bible talk leaders a month ago I had only seen Henry's letter briefly before I spoke and noticed mainly that he criticized the world leader's meeting in Longbeach last November, calling it a "failed" meeting. I made a sarcastic remark in my speech in reference to that. I've since regretted it and apologized to Henry.

I am sorry that I've fostered an environment where leaders tell members to avoid constructive criticism even when it comes from one of our own. That is my fault.

But I beg all of you to be patient with all of your leaders. At this time the learning curve is steep for many who've been in leadership. What we've believed and practiced for a quarter of a century is being challenged from the inside and changed. Many of us would like to catch up with you. Words I spoke a month, a week ago...I wish I could take back. I'm changing. Please forgive me.

I repent, renounce and beg forgiveness for:

Pride and arrogance. Pride is a deadly sin and I've been bullet proof to criticism and you've taken the hits.

Coveting. I've wanted my ministry to be as good or better as others in our fellowship.

Jealousy. Wanting the recognition and praise of men.

One man leadership.

Insular groups that didn't invite criticism. "Insular" is a new word for me. It means groups you can't be in if you disagree with the leader too much.

Creating a culture that doesn't reward speaking up if it's not what the leader wants to hear.

Bible talk leaders being responsible for collecting contribution and pushing other talmud-like regulations.

Women being treated like evangelists for the women.

Putting young leaders over older, large ministries. I hurt them and I hurt you.

Over/under discipling (I accidentally forgot to mention this is my apology last night. I'm sorry)

Sarcasm in my preaching style, pride in my leadership style and defensiveness in my lifestyle.

I repent.

I have fasted and prayed. I am listening. If you want me to answer a question ANYTHING is fair game.

I have no one I believe has sinned against me. I'm ready to go to the alter with you. But if you need to Matthew 18 me, if I've sinned against you I promise I'll listen and not turn it around on you.

I'm confessing, regretting, repenting and trying to be transparent but I know that in many ways I still don't "get it". So hold me accountable, test me in everything.

And if you want to know what we're going to change consider what is now already changed:

I resigned as a World Sector Leader last August.

The WSL group disbanded without a fight last November.

ACES church leaders agreed to local church autonomy last year.

We have no money to give to ICOC corporate and it will have to close down.

ACES stopped receiving money this money and has to close down.

We still have about 50 churches in Africa and the Caribbean that need our support.

With ICOC and ACES not taking any of our support, supporting our missions takes a fraction of what last year's mission contribution was.

We have no stats and none of us believe in them anymore and there's no where to send them to anyway.

But we believe in God, and Jesus as Lord and we still want to be a church.

The church will never be lead the way it was before.

But the church can't stay the way it is now.

We're all sleepless and so miserable we can't eat, our kids are upset, we're grieving.

I'm not indispensable. You don't need me.

But I long for the day you will allow me to participate in the changes and restore new testament Christianity with you, as we all long for the day when God says " Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done."