

An Open Letter to Surfing the Nations

My name is Brent Baccala. Some of you know me only as the man in the white robe holding the sign that reads “Surfing the Nations is a Fraud”. I don’t particularly like the sign, but it’s been given to me by God. I’d rather just stand in front of Surfer’s Church with a microphone and preach, but Tom Bower will not allow that to happen. Let me explain, briefly, my history with STN, tell you what has happened over the last month, and summarize the message that I wish you to hear.

A. My History with STN

I first interacted with STN five years ago when I lived in Haleiwa and was writing a book (*Icarus’ Wing*). After I ran out of money, I approached both the church and the monastery that I supported with my tithe; neither of them would house me. I also approached STN, first asking Richard Moore, and then Tom Bower if I could join the group. The answer was no, and I was left with the distinct impression that STN internships were only open to people with thousands of dollars, not to Christian disciples who had sold their possessions and given the money to the poor (Luke 12:33). I continued interacting with STN until I was categorically banned from the premises, and then left, feeling led by God to Alaska.

I continued praying for STN, praying for Tom Bower and his entire team, the staff, the interns, praying that God give Tom good council and the wisdom to discern it. I even prayed to God to let me forget STN, since it’s been so much on my mind for the last five years! Yet I avoided returning, since we have such deep doctrinal differences, and I’m convinced that Tom holds me in contempt. I finally concluded that STN was constantly on my mind precisely because God was leading me back, so I decided to return, but I knew it wouldn’t be pleasant or easy.

B. The Events of the Last Month

I returned to Oahu on June 4th and took a bus directly to Wahiawa in time for Surfer’s Church that evening. I saw Tom Bower and we exchanged greetings; he bought me a coffee. A few days later I had the chance to sit down and talk with him. I told him bluntly, “Tom, I feel totally convicted by the Holy Spirit to make a sign that reads ‘Surfing the Nations is a Fraud’ and to sit with it outside STN”. I began to explain why. I had spent hours in prayer over this and sensed that God was leading me to this exact course of action.

Tom explained to me that Surfing the Nations is not a Christian organization, it’s a humanitarian organization, gave me some vague talk that there are two kinds of people in the world, those who learn and those who don’t, and then told me that he didn’t have the time to discuss the matter with me. Our conversation lasted no more than ten minutes.

That evening, there was an open mike night at the coffee shop. I asked the barista if I could preach for a few minutes and he told me yes. I signed up at the door with Jeremy and told him that I’d like to preach; he put my name down and suggested five or ten minutes as a guideline, which was fine with me. I bought a drink, sat down, and joined a Bible study group. Then Tom Bower came over, reminded me first to “behave”, and then returned a moment later to tell me, no, I would not be allowed to preach, and I wasn’t. So I behaved, shared with the Bible study group, and then left. Of course, I had anticipated before I walked in the door that this is exactly what would happen.

The next day, I fashioned a sign that said exactly what I had told Tom it would say, exactly what I felt led to by the Spirit, without changing a word: “Surfing the Nations is a Fraud”. I took it to STN around nine o’clock in the morning, and sat down in back on Ohai Street. A few people came by, including Cindy Bower, who gave me some food, and then Tom showed up, pulled out his cell phone, and called the police. I prayed, and felt that I had guidance from God by the time the policeman arrived a few minutes later. We had a cordial exchange and established that although STN’s property in back extended up to the street, there was a public sidewalk in front. So I moved around to the front and sat down, with the sign, by the front door of the coffee shop. Tom now claimed that I was obstructing the sidewalk, but that didn’t fly with the policeman and I was left alone for the rest of the day.

The next day I returned, again, with the sign. A few people talked with me, most notably Carson Gibbs, who probably spent half an hour with me. It was after Carson’s visit that I felt the greatest uncertainty about whether my course of action was right, but Tom Bauer soon removed that doubt when he returned with two police officers to hand me a formal trespass notice and tell me that I could not sit against “his” wall. Again, the Lord showed me the answer. I moved to the fire hydrant, which afforded me a nice seat, away from the wall, where everyone driving down Kamahamaha Highway could see the sign!

The next day was a Saturday, and again I was back with the sign. Late morning two things happened nearly simultaneously. A nice Christian woman stopped to talk with me and invite me to McDonald’s for lunch, and Tom Bauer came by to suggest that I talk to someone he was “accountable to” in an attempt to resolve this. I accepted the lunch invitation, had some good fellowship and prayer, and decided that God would have me accept Tom’s offer, which I did via a text message.

The sign then remained down for a month while I met and exchanged emails with Glen Maiden, the man whom Tom had selected to facilitate this process. I’ve achieved all of those emails in a PDF if anyone wishes to review this process. A key point in Glen’s conclusion was that “[your] references did not affirm [your] teaching or prophecy gift within the church”, along with a claim that the trespass order “is not because of your message, it is because [Tom’s] students are not safe around you and you make them feel fearful”.

Once again, I feel that the Lord has showed me a way forward – this letter.

C. My Message to STN

What is presented at STN is a model of part-time Christianity. Sometimes we give out food for free; sometimes we're selling coffee as a business. We don't actually have to "give to anyone who asks" (Luke 6:30); we only need to give some of the time.

Feeding the Hungry is great! However, Jesus taught us to live this way all of the time.

Most people will stand behind a cash register with a huge rack of food behind them and refuse to feed you if you can't pay. This is immoral. Jesus told us "when I was hungry you fed me" (Matthew 25:35), but if you don't have money these stores will let you go hungry. What would Jesus do? What is the loving thing to do? What would you do if Jesus Christ himself walked up to you at a cash register and said, "I have no money, but may I have a cup of coffee?"

I'm not willing to refuse to feed people who don't have money. Period. I will not treat people that way, and neither should you.

Those who sell their worldly possessions and give the money away (Luke 12:33) are not honored for their obedience to God, they are treated like trash. Let them get a job! After all, we're saved by grace. Nobody else has to obey the commandments, so why should they?

If the owner of a store actually does what Jesus commands – feeds everyone that comes through the door – he will be put out of business, and the store will be taken from him and given to someone else who will not feed people unless they have money. This is our "freedom".

The majority of people are defiant of God and are going to hell for that reason. (Matthew 7:13-14) It is not God's will that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9), but people choose sin for the pleasures of the flesh and the ease of a comfortable life. They persecute people who obey God because disciples have little or no money and their leaders tell them to work their jobs and refuse service to people without money.

Do not emulate them.

The church is very weak, reduced mainly to Sunday worship and Wednesday Bible study. Most Christians spend the better part of their time working for secular leadership so that they can enjoy prosperity, which is an even greater lure than sex. What we need are Christian schools, Christian restaurants (soup kitchens), Christian supermarkets (food banks), Christian housing, Christian transportation, Christian technology – all free. Managed by prayer; no atheist Marxism; no capitalist *quid pro quo*.

We need to use our political freedoms to preach genuine Christianity and to organize against this wicked capitalist leadership that has come to dominate our country. Both revival and revolution are in order.

Our mainstream churches are preaching all manner of heresy because it's popular. The Gospel is watered down so that the commandments become optional, and that's the kind of religion that the majority of people want. Sometimes we give food to anyone who asks; sometimes we're selling coffee only to those who have money. We obey God... *some* of the time.

Tom Bower is preaching that you can run a business, sell coffee, sell internships, sell leadership training, and also run a food bank and offer a free dinner before church. Look at all the people we're helping! You can be a part-time Christian, and live a nice, comfortable life in Hawaii.

Tom's behavior is typical of the majority. They use their authority to silence their opposition. He's not going to talk to me, he's not going to answer my emails, he's not going to let me speak at the open mike night, of course he won't let me preach at Surfer's Church, but he's right there with the police to "get tough" when I pull out the sign, and then claims that it's done because people are "not safe" around me. He wants me to go away, to present an illusion that nobody opposes what he's preaching, that nobody has a different understanding of Christianity, that everybody has to work for money, that these people are just bums, they won't work, they're very angry at the world, and you never hear from us to know our true motives.

The Muslim solution to this is all over the news: kill them all! The Christian solution is discipleship. We turn our lives over to Christ, we seek to obey God to the best of our ability without fudging his commandments, we understand that we will be hated and persecuted by the majority of people who are determined to break us and force us to submit to their wicked authority, and we trust in God, that through his Holy Spirit he will be guide us through this life. One of our most important tasks is to preach, and that's why I came back to STN.

Preaching the Gospel! That's the true Christian solution. Not to condemn Tom, rather to pray for him, to remain respectful of his authority, but not to be silent. (Acts 5:29) Tom Bower has built Surfing the Nations up from scratch, and it's an amazing organization, full of the Holy Spirit and transformational in this community. Yet he is also preaching capitalism and pop religion, he won't listen to anybody who comes against it, and he silences those who preach the true Gospel.

Surfing the Nations is a fraud, and this is the nature of the fraud:

Tom Bower is not a Christian.