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The Serious Problem of Christian Deconstruction

By Freddy Davis

Are you familiar with the concept of religious deconstruction? No? Well, are you aware of the fact that 70% ~ 90% of young people leave the church when they leave high school? Or what about the statistic that when churches reopened after the COVID lockdowns, over 20 million people basically just quit going to church? And here's another one for you: Did you know that the fastest growing religious sector in modern America is now the "Nones" (people who claim to have no religious preference)? Well, the root of all of these issues is summed up in what is now sometimes referred to as the deconstruction movement. It is the phenomenon of people "deconstructing" their faith because they are not sure it is true. Technically, they should then seek to reconstruct as they truly search for the truth. But sadly, many people just drop out.

This deconstruction movement is actually HUGE. There are even websites dedicated to it, and all kinds of social media references. Another term that has been coined to refer to this phenomenon is "exvangelical." It is a term specifically used to describe people who have left evangelicalism. This term was popularized by a man named Blake Chastain in 2016 using the hashtag #exvangelical. He is the host of the *Exvangelical* podcast and the author of *Exvangelical and Beyond*.

There are all kinds of reasons people have left the church. Among the most prominent are such things as a personal crisis of faith, or rejection of the church's moral and social teachings (not to mention just pure lack of personal conviction, and laziness). But for those who specifically leave the faith because of their own personal convictions, they tend to give such reasons as:

- Anti-LGBTQ beliefs and practices,
- Misogyny,
- Racism,
- Sexual abuse in a religious setting
- Skepticism toward the church's teachings, and
- Prejudice and abuse seen in the name of God.

Regardless of the specific designation these people use to identify themselves in current pop culture, what the phenomenon reveals is a very serious problem in modern society. And this problem must also be faced by the church.

In a personal sense, every person who walks away from God and the church is responsible personally to Him for the decisions they make regarding their faith. On the other hand, it also reveals a serious problem within the church itself. Somehow, we are not doing what is necessary to give people the knowledge and understanding they need to recognize and live in the truth.

So just what is happening (or not happening) that is influencing so many people to walk away from the faith? Is the church doing all it can to help people as they deal with their doubts?

The simple answer to that question is that most are not. Dealing with that issue is simply not a part of the DNA of most churches.

What is the Problem?

We have identified the problem above from an external perspective. The problem, at that level, is that people are walking away from fellowship in the body of Christ. But at a more focused, personal level, the problem is that massive numbers of people are not recognizing that God is an objectively real person who can be known in a

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personal relationship. As a result, rather than recognizing and engaging God's real existence, they are looking to some set of non-biblical beliefs to define their understanding of reality.

What is the Solution?

There is an actual solution to this problem, and it is found at two levels – individual and church. At the individual level, people must personally enter into a personal relationship with God, and commit to continual spiritual growth. At the church level, the church must provide the kind of discipleship training that helps their members grasp the truth about the Christian faith, while clearly showing how non-biblical beliefs are not true.

The Individual Solution

When it comes to the individual solution, only an individual is able to address this. No one can put Christ into the life of another. People have to personally and individually invite Christ into their lives and seek to grow in their faith. This does not mean that other people don't have a responsibility. Christians absolutely need to be speaking into the lives of non-believers and other Christians who are struggling with their faith. In some cases it means sharing the gospel and introducing people to Jesus Christ. In other cases it is a matter of answering people's doubts by explaining the things that are causing the doubts. But in the end, individuals have to take this personal step individually.

The Church Level Solution

The church level solution is another matter altogether. The church's responsibility is to provide an opportunity for believers in the body to become equipped to effectively carry the message of Christ out into the world.

Doing this requires building the church organization in such a way as to make it capable of accomplishing the purpose of its existence.

The church exists on two levels – material and spiritual. The core

essence of the church, as the body of Christ, is spiritual. It carries out its spiritual mandate in the relationships that exist in the church family, and as it equips its people to carry out the work of Christ in the world. At the same time, it is a material organization. That is simply the nature of our existence on earth.

As for the material part, the organization must be maintained. There are buildings to build and maintain, finances to be managed, programs to be operated, and committees to be run. All of these are necessary parts of managing a material organization.

On the other side of the ledger, the spiritual part also has to be managed. People need to grow spiritually by learning the Bible, gaining understanding about the essential elements of the Christian faith, and learning the skills necessary to carry out God's work in the world. If this is not done, you end up with a material organization that has no soul. This spiritual part is accomplished by creating opportunities for people to grow in their faith. So, exactly what kind of opportunities need to be offered?

1. Well, to begin with, there needs to be opportunities for people to be challenged with God's Word and how to apply it to their lives. There are numerous opportunities for this, but the most prominent is as the pastor challenges the congregation week in and week out in his sermon messages. Part of a pastor's training certainly involves learning how to manage the material parts of the church organization. This includes overseeing the management of the physical plant, guiding the various committees as they do their work, and providing leadership in how best to manage the church's various programming. But studying the Bible and speaking its truth into people's lives is a critical part of his leadership.

2. Another important spiritual element involves giving people

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opportunities to study God's Word. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His ways to mankind. Without all members of the body having opportunities to gain in-depth understanding about what God has revealed in Scripture, the church is limited in its effectiveness in carrying out the work of God in the world.

3. Still another critical spiritual element that needs to be managed is Christian discipleship training. There are areas of knowledge and skill that need to be mastered beyond just what can be provided in a worship service and Bible study class. Christians also need equipping in areas such as:

- Worldview Basics
- Essential Christian Doctrine
- Missions and Evangelism
- Ethics and Morality
- Apologetics
- A Christian's Devotional Life
- A Study of Other Religions

These are all areas of knowledge that enhance a believer's ability to carry Christ out into the world.

So, What Should We Conclude?

To tell the truth, most churches are at least fairly proficient at providing teaching in a worship service. By the same token, Bible study opportunities are also a fairly consistent part of the programming of most churches. Not every church takes full advantage of these two, but at least the opportunities are generally there.

Christian discipleship training, on the other hand, is way too often the church's Achilles

heel. Where opportunities are provided, they tend to be few and far between. But even when provided, it garners the least amount of participation of all the things the church does.

Turning this around tends to take a lot of time and effort, but it is worth every bit of exertion it takes. We live in a society that is strongly anti-God, and Christians need training in how to be faithful to Christ in this environment. So part of the effort is simply providing the training opportunities.

The other part of the difficulty is that, percentage wise, relatively few people are willing to support that more in-depth training. But that cannot be allowed to be a hindrance. The goal is to reverse the trend of people deconstructing. And the only way to do that is to equip believers to go out into the world with the tools they need to answer people's questions and quell their doubts. This needs to become a priority of the church, or things will continue in the wrong direction.

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