

Childers, Alisa, and Tim Barnett. *The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive, and How to Respond*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2023. 277pp.

Paul, Luke, and Demas labored side-by-side in the early-church era. When the apostle penned his epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, he sent greetings from his fellow laborers (Col 4:14, Phlm 1:24). Sadly, only Luke remained with Paul to the end of his ministry, “for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10–11).

Jesus predicted that this kind of thing would happen time and again. In the parable of the soils, he described a sower who cast his seed indiscriminately on the surrounding land. Some seed “fell into good ground, and brought forth [lasting] fruit” (Matt 13:8). Other seed fell on stony ground, and “immediately it sprang up,” but when the sun came out the plant withered away because it had no moisture or depth of earth (Mark 4:5). Christ explained that the latter soil typified apostates who seem to embrace the gospel gladly at first but fall away when temptation comes (Luke 8:13).

In *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett demonstrate that apostasy continues unabated in the twenty-first century. Nowadays it goes by a different name, *deconstructionism*, which the authors define as “a postmodern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard” (26). As the definition implies, deconstructionism deifies internal feelings (my truth, my comfort, my sincerity, my self-constructed identity) and defies external authority (God, his Word, parents, pastors). Every man therefore gets to do that which is right in his own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Anyone who says otherwise is considered oppressive, toxic, abusive, and power hungry.

Childers and Barnett note that deconstructionism originated with Satan in the Garden of Eden. He tempted Eve first by saying, “Hath God said, ‘Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). Then the serpent patently denied God’s words: “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [God], knowing good and evil” (vv. 4–5). Satan wanted Eve to disbelieve that God was loving, truthful, and sufficient (46).

This is a part of the process all deconstructionists go through when they begin to apostatize. Often, the process will begin with a crisis or a series of difficulties—possibly “unanswered prayer, unexpected suffering, and unwanted hardship” (84). Sometimes would-be apostates see real or imagined sin (adultery, racism, sexism, embezzlement) within professing Christianity and use it as an excuse to question the faith. Ultimately, they abandon Scripture’s teaching on inerrancy, complementarianism (i.e., men and women have equal value but different roles), sexual morality (particularly homosexuality and abortion), Christ’s vicarious atonement, and the final judgment of the wicked.

According to deconstructionist coaches, it does not matter where these exvangelicals end up spiritually as “belief-building should be ‘self-determined’” (112).¹ As Jo Leuhmann has said, “Everyone lands wherever they land. There is no right place to land with deconstruction. Some people land away from faith. Some people land in a different type of faith. Some people become agnostic. Some people

¹ Citing Katie Blake, “What Is a Belief Artisan? Learning to Be Creative with Your Beliefs,” accessed January 12, 2023, <https://drkatieblake.com/blog/2022/8/4/what-it-means-to-be-a-belief-artisan>.

become a different type of Christian. Some people become atheists. And all of those routes in deconstruction are valid and to be respected” (111).²

Interestingly, Childers and Barnett see doubt as a virtue, as long as it does not end in total apostasy. They believe doubt “is sometimes a necessary path to spiritual maturity” (169). Therefore, they wish “to teach Christians to doubt well” (222). The authors, however, fail to recognize that doubting God is a sin. While many saints in the Old and New Testaments distrusted God at times, they were never commended for this action. Rather, they were rebuked for having “little faith” (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). James also exhorted his readers: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . but let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (1:5–8). Scripture is clear that doubters of God ought not to be commended, but rather admonished to cry out, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

Apart from this weakness, the authors do an excellent job analyzing deconstructionism and cautioning Christians not to baptize the term as a synonym for biblical reformation (19).³ They also do good work critiquing scholars in the “evangelical deconstruction project,”⁴ who “tend to appeal primarily to sociology and history rather than Scripture” to determine what is right or wrong (144–152). Some readers may wish Childers and Barnett had included further discussion on those who supposedly do not deconstruct yet claim to de-church, decenter, decolonize, and/or disentangle their faith. Are such individuals truly reforming in accordance with Scripture, or are they moving towards primitivism, antinomianism, and postmodernism? Also, what should Christians make of the seemingly high number of exvangelicals formerly from Charismaticism or CCM? Toward the end of the book Childers, a former singer with ZOEgirl, acknowledges that “if you combine depression, the tension of celebrity, the shallowness of so much of the commercial Christian world, the full realization of your own brokenness, and some bad church experiences, you are ripe for deconstructionism” (246). Many would add emotionalism to her list.

Mature believers reading this book may be convicted of the need to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15). They likewise may feel compelled to pray more earnestly for those under their care, that Satan would not sift them like wheat (Luke 22:31–32). Pastors especially may be encouraged to preach a more robust theology and practice among their flocks, and to call them to “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ

² “Our Journey of Faith Deconstruction,” accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+Vl8b3YeePZA> (quotation starts at 3:53).

³ “There are a number of reasons why the word *deconstruction* should not be baptized, redeemed, or Christianized to mean something healthy or positive. First, what pastors call ‘good deconstruction’ (i.e., using the Scriptures to challenge the ideas you hold) doesn’t match the common use of the word in the culture, which usually calls for the rejection of Scripture as a standard. . . . Second, when people redefine words, the first casualty is clarity, and communication is compromised” (19, 21).

⁴ Particularly Kristen Kobes Du Mez (author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*), Jacob Alan Cook (author of *Worldview Theory, Whiteness, and the Future of Evangelical Faith*), and Beth Allison Barr (author of *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*).

is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust ye shall know that we are not reprobates” (2 Cor 13:5–6, cf. Heb 10:38–39).⁵

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⁵ Readers may also wish to further their studies on this topic by reading John Owen’s classic, abridged and made easy to read by R. J. K. Law: *The Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel*, Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2021).