

Deconstruction

Class 1: January 8, 2023

Schedule

This is the outline for this series:

- 1/8 – What is Deconstruction? An Introduction.
- 1/15 – Who are Generation Z? And why are many of them deconstructing?
- 1/22 – How do we respond? (Part 1)
- 1/29 – How do we respond? (Part 2)
- 2/5 – Fellowship Day with Food and introduction to our two Spring classes
- 2/18 – Class 1 of Revelation (Room 810) / Class 1 of Marriage Class (Room 19)

Group Discussion

Have you had to interact with someone who has walked away from the faith? If you had the chance, what would you say to that person right now?

Mark 4:1-20

¹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹

And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that

“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the

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word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

- Describe the path (the unresponsive heart) [4:15]
- Describe the rocky soil (the impulsive heart) [4:16-17]
- Describe the thorny soil (the preoccupied heart) [4:18-19]
- Describe the good soil (the prepared heart) [4:20]

Faith is a dimmer, not a light switch

WLC 77. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ? Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputes the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification His Spirit infuses grace, and enables the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued; the one does equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

“On a sudden, the thought crossed my mind—which I abhorred but could not conquer—that there was no God, no Christ, no heaven, no hell, and that all my prayers were but a farce, and that I might as well have whistled to the winds or spoken to the howling waves” (C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 87).

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“Being caught between belief and unbelief is a tough place to be. But rather than scolding and shaming such folks, be encouraged to know that Christ had compassion on them. He was patient with them. He doesn’t humiliate Thomas, but invites him to see the truth more clearly: “Put your finger here” (John 20:27). We need to remember God’s own gracious character, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench” (Matt 12:20; Is 42:3)” (Michael Kruger, “Struggling with Doubt? Here are 5 Important Truths to Remember,” *Canon Fodder blog*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.michaelkruger.com/struggling-with-doubt-here-are-5-important-truths-to-remember/>).

What are some things (rocks in your shoe) that put strain on your faith?

A Bad Definition

“Jesus was a deconstructionist.”

“Deconstruction, by which I mean the struggle to correct or deepen naive belief, is a significant part of learning theology. Christians should engage in the task to move beyond simplistic conceptions to belief in a God who is vaster than they can comprehend.” (Kirsten Sanders, “Wait, You’re Not Deconstructing?,” *Christianity Today*, February 14, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/march/exvangelical-theology-wait-youre-not-deconstructing.html>)

A response

These kinds of definitions seem to be redefining the word away from what everyone else understands it to be. What they are defining is the Spirit-powered formation that should happen as Christians become more and more like Christ through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Eph. 4:23-24, Acts 11:18, 1 John 3:9, Jude 20, Heb. 6:11-12, Eph. 3:16-19, Col. 1:10-11, Rom. 6:4-14, Gal. 5:24.

“Sometimes deconstruction leads to clearer Christian convictions; sometimes it’s a code word for walking away from Christ. If a friend tells me that he is deconstructing his faith, I want to keep in mind both connotations.” (John Fenska, “What Augustine Might Say to Someone Deconstructing,” *Mere Orthodoxy*, August 18, 2022, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/what-augustine-might-say-to-someone-deconstructing/>)

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Positive Definitions

“Deconstruction is the process of questioning the core values of your faith tradition and having to significantly change them in one way or another leading to a life of decreased fundamentalism”

They find three core concepts “present in over 97% of people who identify as Deconstructing or Deconstructed:

1. A questioning of one’s faith tradition’s core values and finding it unable to satisfy the questions.
2. A subsequent need to change some of one’s core beliefs.
3. A reduced certainty/fundamentalism in areas of faith/spirituality.”

(<https://thedeconstructionnetwork.com/understanding-deconstruction/>)

“For the purposes of this site, ‘deconstructing’ is any time you are questioning, taking apart, or letting go of religious beliefs you previously held. To quote a recent cover story from Premier Christianity, ‘Some talk about a “mid-faith crisis,” where deeply held doctrines are re-examined and sometimes jettisoned in favor of more progressive ideas. Many continue to self-identify as Christian throughout this time, others take on another label which they say carries less baggage, such as “follower of Jesus”.’”

(<https://www.soyouredeconstructing.com/qa-about>)

A response

A reaction is not an independent action. The self becomes the arbiter of what is true or not.

“The spirit of deconstruction is often born from healthy and reasonable questions and doubt but piloted by frustration and hurt” (Joshua Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 29).

“The deconstruction movement often prides itself on ambiguity, the idea of journeying spiritualists as birds in flight, never settling on a concrete idea, always in motion. But everyone has a theological position on everything. It may not be logical or carefully conceived, but we have them, nonetheless. It sounds oh-so-modern to chase after a worldview that lovingly welcomes the tension of every different mode of thinking and spirituality, but no one lives that way... We all follow someone or something. Everyone is a disciple. The question is: a disciple of what?” (Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 211)

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Negative Definitions

“Deconstruction, as it is popularly understood, is a violent, reactive dismantling and demolition of faith and belief. Transformation unfolds *within* the ancient, sacred community of the Jesus movement, submitted to the Scriptures and to the teachings of Jesus. Deconstruction leaves home or tears it down” (Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*)

“Deconstruction is the process of systematically dissecting and often rejecting the beliefs you grew up with. Sometimes the Christian will deconstruct all the way into atheism. Some remain there, but others experience a reconstruction. But the type of faith they end up embracing almost never resembles the Christianity they formerly knew. Traditional understandings of the Cross, the Bible, and the gospel get taken out with the trash” (Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel?*, 24).

Can you now describe deconstruction to someone?

Proponents / History

1. The Jesus Seminar (1980s and 90s)

2. Emergent Church (early 21st century)

“The Emergent Church is a way of seeing the Bible (and the Christian tradition as a whole) as historical, metaphorical, and sacramental, [and] a way of seeing the Christian life as relational and transformational” (Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 13).

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3. Deconstruction (2010s and 2020s)

www.reddit.com/r/Deconstruction

Podcasts

- **The Bible for Normal People** (Pete Enns and Jared Byas)
- **The Liturgists** (“The Liturgists are committed to helping humanity love more and suffer less by bravely exploring our unique individuality within community and without judgment.”)
- **Exvangelical** (Blake Chastain;
<https://www.postevangelicalpost.com/p/exvangelical-a-working-definition>)
- **You Have Permission** (Dan Koch, spiritual abuse awareness)
- **Cafeteria Christians** (Natalia Terfa, Lutheran pastor; “They knew there was a need in the current cultural and political climate for a kind of Christianity that was not ‘THAT kind of Christian’.”)
- **The Reckless Pursuit** (“Cody and Elaine started the Reckless Pursuit in March of 2018, to give people a safe place to come and unload their spiritual baggage.”)
- **A Tiny Revolution** (Kevin Garcia – a spiritual recovery coach)
- **On Being** (Krista Tippett, journalist and author)
- **The Robcast with Rob Bell**
- **Nomad** (“Faith, Doubt & Reimagination”)
- **The Heavenly Banquet** (“We believe in the all-inclusive, ever-expansive power of God’s love, and we seek to serve those without local access to affirming, justice-centered Christian communities.”)
- **Almost Heretical** (“rethinking the reformed evangelical theology we used to teach”)
- **Another Name for Every Thing** (Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr. “Our vision: Transformed people working together for a more just and connected world.”)
- **Irenicast** (“Especially if you’re evolving out of Evangelicalism or Christian Fundamentalism, you are Irenicast.”)
- **Practice Makes Presence** (discussions on mental health, social justice, and spirituality)
- **The Deconstructionists** (“Come with us to question, doubt and wrestle through this beautiful journey of transformation”)
- **Kitchen Table Cult** (“Kitchen Table Cult unpacks all the things Kieryn and Eve learned at the kitchen tables of their childhoods in conservative Christian homeschooling families”)
- **Deconversion Therapy** (“A Comedy Podcast about the Oddities of Christian Culture”)

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Trifold Goal for the Class

I do **NOT** want to vilify or disparage anyone or any generation.

I do **NOT** want to pump up those of us who are past some of the most basic struggles of faith.

1. EVANGELISM

Do you know how to talk to people who are deconstructing with clarity and charity?

It is very helpful to challenge yourself on what is a core tenet of the faith and what is a secondary or tertiary matter.

Do you know how to talk to people who had to deal with church abuse and/or trauma?

WLC 130. “What are the sins of superiors? The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them, an inordinate seeking of themselves, their own glory, ease, profit, or pleasure; commanding things unlawful, or not in the power of inferiors to perform; counseling, encouraging, or favoring them in that which is evil; dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good; correcting them unduly; careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger; provoking them to wrath; or in any way dishonoring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behavior.” (Ezek. 34:2-4; Phil. 2:21; John 5:44, 7:18; Isa. 56:10-11; Deut. 17:17; Dan. 3:4-6; Acts 4:17-18; Exod. 5:10-18; Matt. 23:2, 4).

2. DISCIPLESHIP

How do you answer your own doubts in the face of evil?

How do you deal with hypocrites in the church?

Do you find yourself speaking poorly of Millennials or Generation Z?

- Rocky, Thorny, or the Path

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3. HOPE

Is the historical Gospel of Jesus helpful to you?

Ephesians 4:21-24

²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Some Issues we will cover

Further reading: Joshua Porter, *Death to Deconstruction: Reclaiming Faithfulness as an Act of Rebellion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 2022.

1. Biblical Illiteracy

“It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself” (John Calvin, *Institutes* I.1.2).

“What a sinful church needs is not deconstruction but deep construction. We have to forsake shallow critique to build a more faithful vision of the community of Jesus. But we cannot do it without holding to the deposit of faith we’ve received from the historic and global church. We cannot do it without the truth of Scripture. And we cannot do it without the Holy Spirit” (Tish Harrison Warren, “The Church Needs Reformation, Not Deconstruction,” *Christianity Today*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/exvangelical-warren-guide-to-deconstruction-church.html>)

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2. The Problem of Evil

“Deconstruction can fail. One reason it fails is because well-trained guides aren’t included in the process. Many assume they are discovering new problems with the Christian faith. If I had a dollar for every young ‘deconstructor’ who discovered the problem of evil for the first time, I could fill a library on the topic. Without a guide who knows something about the terrain of the Christian tradition, about its tensions and perennial questions and the places where good answers are hard to come by, a naive questioner may feel that they have exhausted the Christian faith, that its tradition cannot hold their questions, that they have moved beyond it.” (Sanders, “Wait, You’re Not Deconstructing?,” *Christianity Today*, February 14, 2022).

3. A Politicized Christianity

“A famously depressing study published in 2007 found that 75 percent of young non-Christians had a negative perception of Christians for being ‘too involved in politics’ (*Barna study*). I doubt this really surprised anyone. On the right side of the aisle, nervous, pearl-clutching conservatives lament their children being duped by the Left, won over by the political machine. Meanwhile, on the left side, those rebellious troublemaking kids are telling their therapists about the lingering childhood trauma of being raised by quasi-Christian Republicans. Christians making a mess of Christianity is nothing new.” (Joshua Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 150).

“The deconstructionists are doing the very thing that attribute to the downfall of their belief, just on the other side of the aisle. ‘You don’t really love Jesus,’ they accuse. ‘You only love your politics!’ How do they confront this hypocrisy? By abandoning Jesus and holding fast to their politics. Every disciples of Jesus has to face the frustrating reality of our politically divided world. Will we acknowledge the kingship of Jesus – the supremacy of it – even when it forces us beyond the boundaries of a side?” (Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 153).

4. Hypocrisy

“Nurturing long-term anger, resentment, and bitterness over the rampant failure of so-called Christians drives the furious, hurting soul further inward over time. Mad at their parents, the church that raised them, and the Christianity of their upbringing, the discontent former Christian draws a convenient floodlight on the failure of everyone else, blinding the embittered to their own failure and inconsistency. I see in innumerable deconstructing Christians a purported desire to rebel against their mom and dad, rebel against their Christian culture, rebel against the god of the evangelicals. This isn't rebellion. It's spite. This isn't revolution. It's a tantrum.” (Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 179).

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5. The Denial of Self-Denial

Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Conclusion

“Fight with Him. But ‘stay in the room’” (Bethany Allen, interview, *Death to Deconstruction podcast*, Nov. 15, 2022, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/death-to-deconstruction/id1653687517?i=1000586271772>)

Augustine

1. Believe as much as you can.
2. Stick with the church.
3. Consider what competing loves exist in your heart.
4. Seek him (and not only answers). [“our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee” (*Conf.* I.1).]

(John Fenska, “What Augustine Might Say to Someone Deconstructing,” *Mere Orthodoxy*, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/what-augustine-might-say-to-someone-deconstructing/>).

“We all follow someone or something. Everyone is a disciple. The question is: a disciple of what?” (Porter, *Death to Deconstruction*, 211).

Joshua 24:14-15

¹⁴ “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”