

It Is Written

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Deconversion

By Kyle Campbell

"Deconversion" is a word that I first encountered only a few months ago. It is defined as a loss of faith or leaving one's religion for another religion - or no religion. The numbers are disturbing. The Pew Research Center that said the number of those who identify as Christians has dropped to 65 percent, and the number of those who identify as "religiously unaffiliated," which includes atheists, agnostics, and people who don't identify with any religion, has grown to 26 percent of the population. That's a drop of 12% of those identifying as Christians in the last 10 years. The change was particularly high among young adults.

Thousands of Americans who were once committed Christians have continued to disengage with religion in recent decades, and churches have been struggling with the culture shift in which there are no firm answers. Every one of us could think of at least one young person that we know who is no longer faithful.

This trend is honestly very troubling to me, but I'm old enough now to realize that it's been around for a long time. Paul spoke of those who were once Christians but had "made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Timothy 1:19). He also spoke of Demas who had forsaken him and the Lord because he "loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). And he warned elders in the church that some would arise "speaking perverse things," distorting the truth, and would "draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

I believe that everyone goes through periods of questioning. My questioning of scriptural assumptions over the years has deepened my faith, not eroded it. But I also realize this isn't what's happening for many people. They question, explore, and then leave.

So the question becomes why. I know that a lot in life can choke out the word and its effectiveness, and I also know that a lot of people's faith was never properly grounded in the first place. While the answer is complex, I think some of it may have to do with the state of preaching today.

Preaching is one of the central features of our public worship, and surveys have shown that 75 percent of people still choose a congregation based on the quality of the preaching. Clearly, the way we teach and preach still has an impact, for better or worse. Preaching should help people find faith, not cause people to lose it. And it haunts me that there are thousands of people who grew up in the Lord's church listening to sermons who have walked away.

Faith in Christ is hardly simplistic or trivial, but sometimes our sermons are. People today have access to ideas, insights, arguments, and data most didn't have access to a decade ago. Paul was a powerful preacher, not only because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but because he was deeply schooled in Judaism and in the mind of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Greek philosophers. He understood differing world views and used that knowledge to draw people into the embrace of Jesus as Lord. Everyone who's ever listened to a sermon has questions. Embracing peoples' questions makes them far more open to embracing different answers. So make sure that you're willing to listen and able to provide reasonable answers in a respectful way to our young ones who sincerely question.

A Tree or a Tumbleweed?

By Heath Rogers

"Drifting along with the tumbling tumbleweeds." This is the line from the old country song about a rambling cowboy. He has left his worries behind. His home is on the range where he can roam about freely like the tumbleweeds. This may sound like the good life for a lonely cowboy, but not for a Christian.

The book of Psalms opens by presenting a contrast between the righteous and the ungodly. Instead of filling his heart with the counsel of the wicked, the righteous person delights in and meditates upon the law of the Lord both day and night (Ps. 1:2). This time spent in serious contemplation of God's word allows him to "be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (v. 3). In contrast, "the ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away" (v. 4).

Chaff is the husk that surrounds a kernel of grain. "In winnowing, grain is threshed in order to separate the kernel of grain from the husk and straw. The mixture is thrown into the air with a winnowing fork or shovel. The wind blows the light husks away, the heavier straw falls near the edge of the threshing floor, and the grain falls back to the floor to be collected. Both the light husks and the heavier straw are referred to in the words translated 'chaff' in the Bible" (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery 136).

The primary contrast between these two individuals is that of stability and instability. A tree with strong and deep roots is stable. It can withstand the winds that blow upon the landscape and remain fruitful. Chaff is already dead. It is weightless and without an anchor. It has no stability, but instead is subject to every wind that blows upon it.

What is wrong with being like chaff? Why shouldn't we want to drift along through life like a tumbling tumbleweed? This psalm tells us that "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment" (v. 5) but instead "shall perish" (v. 6).

Judgment comes on a small scale many different times throughout one's life. Every temptation and trial of life is like a wind that blows upon us. How do we manage in the storms of life? Are we like a tree? Do we have deep roots that sustain us through these judgments and allow us to remain alive and fruitful? Or are we like a tumbleweed - hopelessly driven about by every problem that arises against us?

In addition to the temporal judgments experienced in this life, we know that final judgment will come upon all of us on the last day. The wheat will be gathered into the barn, but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

The choice is up to us. Psalm 1 tells us the difference between the two individuals is their attitude towards God's word. If we will delight in and meditate upon God's word, we will have the stability and nourishment needed to withstand the storms of life. However, if we neglect God's word in favor of the counsel of the wicked, we are already dead and defenseless against the storms of life.

Do you delight in God's law? Do you make time to read and seriously think about the Word of God? Are you a doer of the word (James 1:22)? How will you stand in the judgment? Think about these things.

Are you a tree or a tumbleweed?