

5 Church "Rejection" Traps Leaders Should Avoid

[by David Fitch](#)

Most of us have faced “church-abuse” in one way or another. Perhaps we’ve experienced the abuse of “being judged,” the abuse of being manipulated to do something by someone telling us it is Biblical, the abuse of being manipulated to do something by a leader for his/her cause under the auspices that this is God’s Mission, the abuse of being manipulated to support more programs at your local church under the guise that this also is God’s Mission, or maybe the abuse of being manipulated to “make a decision” for Christ and/or get someone else to make this decision under the fear that we’re all going to hell if we don’t. Have you experienced any of these abuses?

I think you could interpret a lot of post-evangelicalism as a reaction to these abuses. In their wake, we get overreactions. So we often hear people gathering for church saying: all judgment is bad, the Bible’s authority is purely personal, all authority in the church cannot be trusted, we don’t need organized church, and conversion is abusive. We overreact to these things by rejecting these things. I contend such an overreaction to the point of rejection is catastrophic for the formation of church life together, family life and personal transformation into Christ. These days, every pastor has got to be able to lead through these overreactions and keep them from becoming rejections. Here’s the five rejections with some of my observations on how to think about them in shaping a community of Christ for His mission.

1.) Rejection of organization:

Many of us have been turned off by the excessive programming of modern evangelical church. They are tired of being over busy. They find church controlling as it centers everyone’s life in the church organization away from mission. Soon, life becomes about keeping the organization going as opposed to living in Christ for God’s Mission in the world. Many (especially us missional’s) as a result reject organization. I think we who are pastoring need to nurture this reaction into a healthy appreciation for organization that facilitates mission. WE need to nurture a healthy resistance to organization whenever it deviates from mission. We need to cultivate organic organization that organizes around life in the neighborhoods. Yet we must pay attention to the organizing that is necessary to bring people together into networks for life together (1 Cor 12, Eph 4 etc.). Let our organization stay organic, de-centered, de-programmed always directing people into becoming the social presence of Christ in the neighborhood. Without such organization, the community will be a frustrated morass.

2.) Rejection of Authority in Leadership:

Many of us have been abused by the pastor who acts like an autocrat ordering the whole congregation (and staff) under his/her rule for the purpose of achieving “his” vision. The

reaction by many has been to disavow leadership in toto (I get accused of that a lot). We who are pastoring need to nurture this over-reaction into a culture that recognizes the decidedly servant-charactered leadership of the Christian community. Always acting in submission to one another, the pastors model the shared nature of life together under His Lordship. This is a flat leadership led by multiple pastors who are empowered to act in the authority of their gifts. This in turn empowers the congregation to recognize authority in their own gifts. Without such leadership the community will die. I have written much on this elsewhere

3.) Rejection of Judgment:

Many of us have been abused by harsh judgment by people who don't know us, who do it out of a sense of superiority, and who do not empathize or bring love/forgiveness/hope in Christ Jesus. This kind of judgment in the church is a denial of Christ. This has led us to reject judgement altogether. Yet we need judgements – i.e. discernments of the truth in our lives. We who are pastoring need to nurture this overreaction into a culture of love where love means commitment to the growth of the other in Christ. This demands we learn how to speak truth ONLY in love and care for the other. We start by admitting we are incapable of telling the truth to ourselves apart from a community of the Spirit. And so without truth-telling in love and submission to the other, we will all go on in our lies. We need to learn how not to lie. There will be no healing, no salvation part from learning the truth about ourselves. We do this by learning to live together out of His love, acceptance and humility always willing to hear and confess our sins (Eph 4:14-15; James 5:16). Such a culture of love will not judge those outside the community(1 Cor 5:12-13). For those inside the family however we are committed to judge/discern as we do it together in mutual submission. We need truth-telling, discernment and judgement for life itself. Without it the community will dissolve into a mutually enabling sin addicted dysfunctional mess.

4.) Rejection of authority in Scripture:

Many of us have been abused by heavy-handed abusive narrow interpretation of Scripture by pastors. Pastors have taken Scripture and abused it to manipulate people into their own agendas under the auspices of the Scripture as God's Word. This has led us to reject the idea of an authoritative Scripture altogether. It then becomes a book of human experiences with God to get in touch with individually. But this is the Story of our lives in Christ. It orders the way we see the world and participate in life with God and His mission. We who are pastoring need to nurture this overreaction into a respect for the authority of the text as it carries the authority of Jesus handed to the apostles and then to us. We must preserve its unique authority in our midst and learn how to read it together as a community in submission to the Lord always holding interpretation up to the confirming work of the Spirit in our midst. Without the Scripture the church becomes an identity-less people without a Story.

5.) Rejection of Conversion.

Many of us have been abused by altar calls, by threats of going to hell, all in the name of getting a decision. This sometimes excess coercion/manipulation has led us to reject conversion altogether. But there can be no entrance into the Kingdom's dynamic power

apart from repenting and entering what God is doing through Christ in the bringing of His Kingdom into the world (Mark 1:14). We who are pastoring need to nurture this overreaction into a full appreciation of each one's intentional entrance into God's Kingdom and what He is doing in the world. We need the means to invite those who "belong before they believe" into the Kingdom life via a conversion – a move from one world into the next. This is personal and intentional. This is baptism. Without conversion, the church will forever wander in the wilderness, never being intentional about what God has done, is doing, and will do in and among us.

Hope this helps. What other abuses in the church have led to overreactions that can in turn be nurtured towards a new faithfulness?