Compartmentalizing Christ

Luke Hulley 23 March 2017



We will probably all feel the challenge of trying to juggle work, spouse, rest, kids, recreation and ministry at some point in our lives. Sometimes it can feel downright impossible to keep them all up in the air at the same time! So maybe you try to do more than one thing at the same time (send a couple of emails while spending quality time with my wife – why didn't I think of this before?!). Maybe you try to work longer hours in your day, until good, restful sleep is something you think back on nostalgically every now and again. We eventually realise that something has got to give and that some tough choices need to be made. It is in these everyday decisions that we grapple with the very nature of the kingdom and our place in it.

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Kingdom Priorities

Maybe you are still not sure what I'm talking about? Let's say I find out this Friday that my parents have planned a 'spontaneous' visit to Cape Town, and Sunday is the only day they plan to be at my house. Suddenly I feel the pressure to skip church and stay home to host them, but is

this the right thing to do? I could leave them at home while I go to church, but didn't Jesus say I should 'honour my parents'?

One more example. On Sunday, my little Jonnie has an important rugby match, but I'd have to miss the first day of the annual church camp to get him to it. What do I do? If I go to church, that will seem very spiritual and I won't feel like I've disappointed God, but wouldn't that make me a bad parent? Won't Jonnie begin to despise church and maybe even God?

I have found Christians respond to these pressures in a variety of unhelpful ways. The most common response is to follow the path of least resistance. Jesus described it this way: '...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.' (Mark 4:19) This approach usually marks the beginning of the slow fade away from Christ. Following Christ requires sterner stuff. We cannot count on a life which is free from conflict, where everything works out in a way that pleases everyone all the time. Dead fish go with the stream. 'Nuff said.

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Spiritual vs Unspiritual

But there is another response which dishonours Christ, and it is far more subtle. It goes something like this: everything in my life which is spiritual is good and everything unspiritual is bad. A certain dichotomy begins to formulate in the mind, which goes roughly as follows:

When I feel like I have done enough spiritual stuff to keep God happy, then I 'splash out' on a bit of 'me time'. So maybe on weekends, or maybe my December holidays, I 'check out' and I treat myself by doing all the 'unspiritual' things that I've been wanting to do, but just couldn't get around to because I was too busy with all the spiritual stuff. I believe this kind of thinking fails to fully understand the nature of the New Covenant. Let me explain what I mean.

Jesus revealed the true nature of the kingdom and it comes down to this: an inward transformation that fundamentally changes who I am and the things which I passionately love. (Jeremiah 31:33).

The love that the Spirit gives is only satisfied in Jesus. To be pledged to Christ means I only really care about two things: preparing myself for His return, and helping the rest of the Bride to do the same. The work of the Spirit is to transform us not only in what we do, but why we do those things, and who we do them for. Every little 'compartment' of our lives finds a new purpose in Christ. More than that, Jesus changes how I do these things. Let me explain by getting super

practical:

> Christ empowers us to love our wives, our kids and our extended family more than we would otherwise have been capable of doing.

Family in the Kingdom

I am not choosing Christ or my family, I am learning how to put Christ at the centre of my family. It has to do with loving them differently, but ultimately loving them more.

To extend the example I began earlier, if my parents come to visit me on a Sunday, they will know where to find me because they know that my passion is Christ and I express it by serving His body. The very same thing happened to Jesus, and this is what He said: 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' (Luke 2:49) At another time, when Jesus' family came for an unexpected visit, He rebuffed them, saying, 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.' (Luke 8:21) As those who have inherited the heart of Christ by the Spirit, we have a responsibility to model what a Christ-centred life looks like to our immediate and extended family. This is truly loving.

Let our Christ-centred living not cheapen our love for our family at all. Christ empowers us to love our wives, our kids and our extended family more than we would otherwise have been capable of doing. This is exemplified in Christ in the rather remarkable incident on the cross. As He was suffocating to death by this torture, we hear him speaking to John and making arrangements for His mother to be taken care of after His death! (John 19:27)

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Rest in the Kingdom

Rest is a gift from God and a healthy part of the rhythm of life. We find this exemplified in the Sabbath rest of the Old Covenant; a day for rest and worship. The point is that we rest with Christ and we rest for His kingdom. We are not taking a break from Christ, but rather we enjoy the blessings He has given us and we are refreshed to be effective in His kingdom, rather than getting tired and burned out.

Sometimes the most 'spiritual' thing you can do, after giving your all in serving the church, is to take your wife on a getaway where it is just the two of you. As we rest, we have the opportunity

to reflect on all that Christ has done, and even dream a bit about what He has in store. What is important to consider in our rest and our recreation is how we choose to enjoy these times, which should be in a way which most glorifies Jesus and blesses His church.

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Work in the Kingdom

Many of the most pertinent instructions in the New Testament regarding work are addressed to slaves! For example: 'Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward.' (Col 3:23,24) In this way, Christ has lifted the value and the dignity of work. If you are working to honour Christ, then for you it is a spiritual and holy calling.

So the kingdom of Christ has a profound influence on how we work, but as we discovered with family, we also need to be sure that we model to our colleagues, and even our bosses, what our first passion in life is – caring for and beautifying the church of Christ. This will sometimes lead to conflict, but we owe it to the world to show them the wonder of the kingdom.

As we begin to better understand what this Kingdom is really all about, we find that we are able to see more clearly what we should be spending our time on, which revolutionises how we do the things that we do. Our lives are going to look beautifully different; a Christ-centred life always does. So let's allow the Spirit to transform our hearts with love for Christ and smash all the little boxes that we sometimes put Him into. May Christ 'fill all things everywhere with himself'. (Ephesians 1:23)