



When One Thing Overshadows All Things

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. — Ephesians 4:14-16

There has been a very long-term and unhealthy trend which has been taking place within the Church which continues to sharpen with intensity: *specialization*. In spite of the fact that whatever abilities we were born or entrusted with by the Spirit are only proven to biblically accomplish God's purpose when "*each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*", in the past thirty or so years we have seen the rise of "ministries" which generally never previously existed as such, many of which have become an island unto themselves. Granted, I am using a very broad brush, and we don't want to throw the authentic and Spirit-filled under the bus with those who are not, but the trend of specialization within the Church in the West is a relatively recent one and, I would argue, without a firm, *scriptural* foundation. We now have those who claim to have a "ministry" which appears to be wholly concentrated on a single gift, office, or doctrine which elevate that one thing to the point that it overshadows and subjugates everything else.

The first and easiest example to explain what I am referring to is one that I was once blind and stupid enough to have claimed for myself, "I have a 'music' ministry". Biblically speaking, there is no such thing. All we can make a case for *scripturally* is that music can be a tool used in the course of the biblical activities of evangelism, exhortation, etc. In other words, you are really an evangelist or teacher who happens to employ the *tool* of music, which means the priority of your ministry is always on teaching and living the Word of God. But that is exactly the problem once the emphasis is changed to "music"—it replaces not only the rightful place of God's Word in one's efforts but begins to deemphasize everything else in the process.

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The proof of this is how a “music ministry” or “worship team” actually often operates. They do not have time for real fellowship or more than cursory prayer because it is deemed more important to rehearse. They spend more time writing their own songs than deriving them from the inspiration of Scripture, so the message eventually becomes their own. Eventually they redefine “worship” to mean “music”. Shake off the dust from your concordance and look up all the references to “worship” in Scripture, making careful note of what takes place and how rarely you can find a reference to music or music-related activity. It’s not zero, but it’s very rare.

The very first reference to “worship” in Scripture is how Abraham described his impending sacrifice of Isaac. (Gen. 22:5) The two most common Hebrew words translated “worship” are “*abad*”—“to serve”, and “*shachah*” and “*cagid*”—“to prostrate oneself”. The most common Greek terms “*proskuneo*”—“to fall or prostrate before” and “*latreia*”—“service as a slave” paint the same picture of “worship” as something rarely experienced when the leader of the Sunday morning worship team bellows, “Are you ready to worship?” What they mean is, “Are you ready to sing?” Nothing about what takes place resembles personal humility or service to our Lord.

For the biblically interested, a study of the use of music throughout Scripture is far more often associated with praise, which is focused on acknowledging as much as possible the authority, sovereignty and vastly superior nature of the triune Godhead above ourselves. But notice how the corruption of equating “worship” with “music” has led to the introduction of songs which emphasize what *we* feel about God rather than acknowledging Him in spite of our feelings and situation.

Because the priority is placed on “music” in a “music ministry”, *music* becomes the focus. Practice and rehearsal supplant fellowship, prayer and Bible study, and the solution to everything is viewed first and foremost through music. Songs must be written, performances must be scheduled, albums must be recorded. It doesn’t take long for them to concentrate on those channels through which their music can be marketed and distributed (because, “We have to minister to as many as possible”), be it through radio stations, concert promotion, or making the now requisite accompanying music video. Why has “Christian music ministry” transformed itself into the “Christian music industry”? All good intentions aside, it eventually mimics completely their worldly counterparts because they eventually operate the same way because they actually have the same worldly goals.

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When someone who, biblically speaking, is in reality an evangelist or pastor over-realizes the tool of music to the degree that they become a “music ministry”, they inevitably begin to view *everything* through the prism of music and make everything else subordinate to it. And have you noticed how difficult, if not impossible, it is to get them to participate in anything else *not* involving music? But that is just one example of many.

During the first half of my life, there was no such thing on this planet as a “discernment ministry”. Who could possibly document how many claim that distinction today? Setting aside what would take a whole other teaching to properly explain the difference between the gift of “*distinguishing spirits*” (1 Co. 12:10) and the acquisition of “discernment” which comes from devotion to and application of God’s Word without supernatural impartation (Heb. 5:14, Philip. 1:9), so many “discernment” ministries repeat the same behavior of “music” ministries by elevating one biblical characteristic of a believer’s life to the point that everything must be viewed through the prism of “discernment”.

It is my observation that this over-realization of discernment is most often focused on the areas of prophecy and doctrine. In terms of a so-called prophetic “discernment” ministry, the assertion is whether or not someone or something is in precise alignment with that discernment ministry’s eschatology—how they believe prophetic Scripture is being or will be fulfilled. Those “discernment” ministries who focus on doctrine are the arbiters of how someone is, in their estimation, a true versus false teacher. But what so often is occurring is that in the one instance everything is viewed first and foremost through the prism of prophecy, and the latter through the measuring stick of absolute truth. In both cases it becomes a problem when a prophetic “discernment” ministry decides it has a rigid lock on prophecy and anyone who disagrees with them is therefore a “heretic”, and when those discerning “true” from “false” teachers make no allowances for even the slightest error which has no impact on eternal salvation, and in turn declare someone a “heretic” or, more often lately, “apostate”.

These two examples of “ministries” which come to view everything in life through a single lens are probably the poster child for failing the biblical test of achieving Paul’s stated goal that the biblical measurement of success is when a ministry “*causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*” When one visits their websites, listen to their teachings or read the comments posted in their online forums, no spiritual

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court of inquiry would be able to indict them of inducing growth in the Body of Christ much less “*building up of itself in love*”.

I would submit that ultimately this is the spiritual litmus test by which all of these so-called “ministries” fail. A “music” ministry measures itself by music, a prophetic discernment ministry measures itself by what it says that no one else is saying, and a doctrinal discernment ministry by its list of who has been naughty and nice in strict accordance to their own standards. These and many more examples just like them are proven to be in trouble themselves by the very fact that they neither promote growth in general of the whole Body of Christ, much less have ever had a measurable effect in the exercise of the highest ideals of biblical love.

The problem with specialization arising in the Church is actually a reflection of a flawed “ecclesiology”—the fancy seminary term describing the Church’s relationship with Christ. Although this has become a prolific problem of late, it is not without precedent, as Paul seems to address this very situation in the Early Church.

For the body is not one member, but many. *If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?*

But now there are many members, but one body. *And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it.*

*But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, ***so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*** And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. — 1 Corinthians 12:14-26*

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Ministries who specialize in and view everything through a single function or attribute ultimately come to that place where they say to the rest of the Body, “*I have no need of you*”. Instead of building up their fellow parts into Christ the Head, in the end they find themselves attempting to *replace* the Head. They cannot build up the Body in love because they become the very antithesis of love.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. — Ephesians 1:22-23

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. — Colossians 1:18

Of late I have witnessed this particularly intensifying in the area of eschatology, where people are now defining who is and isn't a true Christian based mainly on one's position on the timing of the Rapture. This is especially disturbing because nowhere in Scripture is it even remotely hinted that our salvation depends on our belief of when the Rapture will take place. There are certainly immutable beliefs when it comes to the core issues of salvation, justification and sanctification, but whether the Rapture comes at the beginning, middle or end of the Tribulation? But try to find an online discussion forum on the Rapture where the postings don't devolve into name calling much less accusations that one side or the other is on the path to eternal damnation. It is no small group who over-realizes a single aspect of Scripture—in this case, the Rapture—to the point that it is elevated above everything else.

There are those who over-realize God's righteousness and justice to the point that they begin to completely trivialize and diminish God's love and mercy. There are those who over-realize God's love to the point that there is no longer any spiritual accountability and an actual accommodation of sin. There are those who over-realize the gift of tongues to the point that in spite of Paul's teaching (1 Cor. 14), it becomes the end-all/be-all measuring stick over and above the rest of the gifts. There are those who over-realize meeting the physical needs of the poor and dispossessed that in order to focus on the immediate, they forgo the requisite accompanying message of the Gospel to address the even more important issue of the eternal. And when everything comes to be viewed through their chosen single lens, notice how their behavior so often betrays not only the failure to build up the rest of the Body in love, but by the absence of same in their own life. They not only no longer have time for anything outside what consumes

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their singular focus, but come to treat with disdain and derision those who dare to incorporate more than their narrow aims call for.

Satan doesn't want *anyone* to hear the Gospel in the first place, but when they do, he does everything in his powerful bag of tricks to render it ineffective in our life. At work here is a one of his most subtle and clever ruses, to get us to overemphasize a truth to the point that it overshadows all other truth and, in the end, becomes error. Our pursuit of specialization slowly begins by making a distinction in our mind between what *we* are doing and what everyone *else* is doing. Eventually we become not merely separated and operating independently, but actually become a division within the Body itself. We judge everyone and everything by whether or not they distinguish everyone and everything with the same spiritual myopia. It may be an important doctrine, function or office designated with the Church overall, but biblically it cannot operate by and of itself alone and apart from it.

There is a strange contradiction in how the marvel of the Internet and related technologies at the same time can bring everyone instantly together on one corner of the virtual highway, and yet allow everyone to be separated and operating independently on their own piece of Internet real estate. In the olden days of my youth, you had to be at least good enough or articulate enough to convince someone to publish your books or allow you to speak at their church or conference. Nowadays, *anyone* can publish a website or Facebook page and on that basis declare themselves to be a "ministry". But to what degree are they incorporated into the whole Body of Christ and not only earning their keep as a contributing member, but accepting the support and guidance of the other members equally at work?

*Iron sharpens iron,
So one man sharpens another. — Proverbs 27:17*

"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another. — John 15:16-17

We may each bring something unique to the table, but we're *still* supposed to all be sitting at the same table.

In Him,

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