

‘From Now On I Will Go To The Gentiles’

by David Orton

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The Current Realignment of the Church

But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'

Acts 18:6

Hearing the voice of God

I was in the national capital attending a roundtable conference of leaders committed to transformational city-reaching.

Sitting at the table listening to my fellow delegates I suddenly heard the voice of God. Without any human contrivance their voices all of a sudden seemed to be turned down and over the top of them I heard, almost audibly, the Lord say, "*From now on I am going to the Gentiles!*"

The words carried with them a sense of foreboding—of divine import, an imminent divine action that was threatening. It felt and sounded like it came from a deeply held determination in the heart of God in the face of something horribly wrong or unjust—in fact, it sounded like a declaration of war!

A line of demarcation

Since that time in 2005 this declaration of divine intent has played out with a line of demarcation becoming increasingly clear in the body of Christ.

For us in our life and ministry it meant some fundamental shifts. Since 1993 I had served catalytically in our city of Melbourne and across our nation to bring pastors and leaders together primarily to seek the face of God. In 2000 I stepped aside from these various citywide and national roles into a hiatus, which realigned us for a new season, which produced the book, *Snakes in the Temple*. Previously in 1999 I had found myself unexpectedly out of pastoral ministry to engage in what became a five-year process of realignment. It was not until 2004 with our convening the *Open Heavens Over Australia Conference* in Melbourne and the release of the book that we were to re-emerge.

Realignment of self

Over that time God consolidated a three-decade-long process of realignment relating to identity. In my view this is the foundational realignment of all the current shifts in the larger body of Christ. Without this all the other shifts of the so-called 'emerging church' are either merely cosmetic or only a re-engineering for greater growth and effectiveness. They are just more of the same in the quest for a more effective technology of doing church.

So why is 'identity' so important to the current reformation? Because it is central to who we are—to our sense of significance, and therefore of *self*. It determines what we do and why—it is the inner motivation for action and behaviour. Our source of identity reduces to two possibilities: either creator-God or the creation. As I show in my book, *Snakes in the Temple*, this is the essence of idolatry.

An idol is simply a created thing – either material or non-material – which provides me with a sense of well-being. This means anything can be an idol: a relationship, a role, a ministry, a status, a belief, a church, or even my own self-perception—whatever provides me with a sense of affirmation and significance.

Our self-perception is particularly prone to the inroads of idolatry. We create a false reality about ourselves in which we then live. This is especially so when the emotional pain of life becomes too much to handle. In a form of denial we transfer our consciousness to an "upper story" of mental self-perception to cope. This false reality affirms me, telling me I'm okay, but contradicts the pain of my actual emotions creating a sense of inner dissonance, if not confusion. It produces Christians who

live out of the “upper story” of their thought-life but are not emotionally, nor spiritually, whole. They may even know how to move in the gifts and operations of the Spirit but at a character level are eating of the tree of knowledge, that is, human rationalising as opposed to the tree of life and divine revelation. It also therefore manifests in an inability to receive counsel without being deeply threatened. To continue to feel good about myself, in the face of counsel or correction, I must take a self-defensive stance. To feel safe, my self-image becomes a stronghold defending me from the truth and those who speak it—from truth-sayers. This is the cause of much relational tension and breakdown in the body of Christ, particularly in times of reformational change.

More than ministry *restructure*

This line, drawn in the sand through the word of the Lord to us, is far deeper and far more threatening than any realignment of mere ministry structure or protocol. Many, for example, are fighting over the redefinition of the local church and its structures, particularly in light of the so-called “out-of-church phenomenon”, but these issues while important are missing the point. The outward structures of the church as we have known it, is only the institutionalisation of inward problems.

The holiness of God demands the total eradication and destruction of idols. If his presence is to return this is the inescapable imperative. This is a heart shift. It is foundational to any reformational shifts of structure, protocol, or vocabulary. He cannot dwell with false gods—with the ‘idol of jealousy’ (Ezk 8:3). The subtlety though is that we do not outwardly forsake the worship of the one true God. But inwardly we unwittingly derive security from the false idol-strongholds of our own self-perception. And so, the deception is deep and insidious.

This calls for a foundational realignment of *self*. It is the paradox of losing our life to find it:

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

John 12:25 NASB

Rather than deriving our sense of *self* from a created thing – from ministry success, a career, or a role – you will derive it exclusively from God. This is more than an “upper story” matter of belief—the mental assent that says, “*Of course I get my significance from God—that’s what Christians do!*” It demands a reconnection with the reality of your pain and true condition. It calls for a soul laid bare and an utter abandonment to God. It usually occurs through a crisis of financial, ministerial, relational, or career deprivation where we are forcefully fasted from the things of this world by an invisible but merciful hand.

Yielding to the *realignment*

If we yield to that hand, awesome and beautiful things result. As I lay my life down I am realigned to exclusively discover my significance in beholding him. Instead of rushing from one activity to the next performing for God’s approval, or the approval of my peers, my whole attention is stolen by the beauty of who he is. I find myself falling deeper into him, discovering that my life is hid in Christ in God. As my heart resonates with his I discover a true sense of *self* – that I am made in his image – that I am bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh – and in fact that I am beautiful – that I am His child. This is the smile of God—the existential affirmation for which you were created—the pleasure of the Father that declares, “*This is my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased!*” (Mtt 3:17).

Realignment of *structure*

Returning to the word I received in our national capital: “*From now on I am going to the Gentiles!*” Dramatically casting out his garments, Paul declared this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the synagogue. To the Jew, it was a scandalous declaration of the intent of God to move out from the traditional boundaries of the synagogue. For our ministry in 2005 this meant some significant realignments of our programme; the cancelling of several events that were focussed on the synagogue leaders—in today’s language the pastors of the institutional church. But why was this? I have had it said to me that I am against pastors and the local church. Unfortunately, I have to plead guilty, but not for the reasons they think!

I love pastors, but not the inherited values and structures behind them. The present structures of ministry and of the local

church have been inherited from aberrations that occurred between the 2nd and 5th centuries. They have legitimised and institutionalised values that are alien to the spirit of Christ (see chapter 9, *Snakes in the Temple*), becoming the source of identity and security for leaders, but also of great abuse to the people of God, including pastors.

Realignment & convergence

The present realignment is away from these values and structures out to the Gentiles. But who are the Gentiles? They are the *ethnos*, the people groups who have been marginalised by the spirit of religion. Among others they are creatives, prophetics, radical reformers, intercessors and entrepreneurs. These are some of the communities that Jesus is currently wooing. We will therefore see various streams converging under the hand of God for kingdom increase: inner healing, creative (arts & media), prophetic, reformational (emerging church), intercessory, entrepreneurial (business), and signs and wonders streams. Their common ground is found in the 'heart of David', and thus a desire for Christ's reign and manifest presence to increase in society.

Realignment from local church to apostolic bases

But does this mean the forsaking of the old order of the synagogue, a complete shift from the local church system? Yes and no!

No, in that on the heels of Paul's prophetic declaration of the shift to the Gentiles he, in the very next chapter of Acts, arrives in Ephesus and goes straight to the synagogue (19:8). This was in harmony with his apostolic habit of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (see Rom 1:16). The apostolic still reached into the old order.

Yes, however, in that the old order of the synagogue (local church system) was not the base of operation for the birth of a new wineskin into the nations. This transferred to a transitional and strategic base, first seen in Corinth with his shift from the synagogue next door to the house of Titius Justus. Even so, the synagogue ruler and his family still believed in the Lord! (see Acts 18:7). And then seen in Ephesus with Paul's transfer again from the synagogue, but this time to the school of Tyrannus, from where he reached the whole of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) within two years! (see Acts 19:8-10).

God is in the process of moving strategically from the synagogue (local church system), out to the nations, but through first establishing apostolic bases of operation as seen in Corinth and especially Ephesus. These will be free from the constraints of the old order. These modern day apostolic bases will vary from strategic centres of influence (as small as two or more individuals) within particular cultures (e.g. the arts or media communities) to residential houses of prayer that retrain and send kingdom agents to infiltrate cultures and communities that have been targeted by the Spirit of God. Some old order local churches under true apostles will also convert into apostolic bases. Together they will provide both the environment for the full restoration of God's glory and a base of operation for the planting of new wineskin churches (simple churches & house churches). These new churches will be free of franchise controls (organisational networks and denominational systems), but through relationship be aligned with authentic apostolic expression and authority (*Apostolic Strategy and The Saul-David Transition*).

As apostolic bases they will also reach back into the synagogues. True apostles will be bi-lingual – able to minister in the synagogues from an apostolic mandate – but not of them; they will be free of the system because they have been realigned internally. Through death their self-life will have been realigned from identity according to the principles of this world to identity in him. They will be free in spirit, and therefore free of the values and systems of men. When the old structure resists the word of the kingdom, they, like Paul, will be able to shake out their garment and proactively move on, responding to the upward call, and counting all things as loss for the sake of Christ.

The living edge of God's activity is moving from the synagogue out to the Gentiles. The cloud of his presence is moving. Let us heed the call to follow him out of the systems of men and into the true freedom of the sons of God.

God is sovereignly realigning the church—first our sense of *self* and then the *structures*!

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