

Purpose-Shift

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The Saul-David Transition Part 4/8

But he removed Saul and made David their king ...

Acts 13:22

Purpose-shift

For those who respond to the Spirit of God, there is a *purpose-shift* occurring—a shift from *gift* to *agape*.

Samuel's response to Saul's disobedience, "To **obey** [*agape*] is better than **sacrifice** [*gift*]", is instructive (1 Sam 15:22). Saul, like the contemporary church, had mistakenly focussed on gift and ministry. He saw ministry success as the main-game—as his purpose. It reminds me of some miracle workers on the day of judgement:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Matthew 7:21-23 NASB

Saul, like these miracle workers, thought that his high sounding words, "*The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions*", would throw the wool over the prophet's eyes (see 1 Sam 15:9-14). Our loud protestations of, "*Lord, Lord*", likewise, will not fool Jesus on the day of judgement. Those who have habitually practiced ministry out of self-will will be exposed for their disobedience to the Father. Operating their gifts and ministries outside of intimacy with the Father in this age, they will not only be deprived of their ministries in the age to come, for they will cease, but also intimacy with the very Lord they have just so vociferously addressed! What a warning to a contemporary church so enamoured with pseudo-spiritual 'spin'—with gift and celebrity!

This is why Paul exhorted the Corinthians, likewise enamoured with gift and celebrity – in their case pseudo-apostles – to pursue the "more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31). Having just taught positively concerning these gifts, he is now telling them there is an alternative to their idolatrous infatuation. Through viewing gifts and ministry as the main-game they had succumbed to the cult of celebrity and success.

Gifts and ministries can be an "excellent way"! However, he is now showing them a "more excellent way" as he shifts the next chapter. While he encourages them to "eagerly desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 14:1) there is another way that is distinctly counter-cultural—the '*agape* way' (1 Cor 13). This is the way of holy passion and selfless desire, of being lost in the heart of God, who is *agape*. Without this their gifts and ministries will only be empty noise—a clanging cymbal (v 1).

It is time for the contemporary church to "give up her childish ways", to move on from its infatuation with gifts—to move on from being *purpose driven* to *agape led*.

Paul could say regarding the transition from *gift* to *agape*:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. Now we see only a blurred reflection in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now what I know is incomplete, but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. Right now three things remain: faith,

hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:11-13 ISV

Faith, hope, and love all have lasting power. Faith and hope, though, activate *gifts*—it relates to what God *does*; while the greatest – *agape* – relates to who God *is*. Now is the time to move to the next level – from *gift* to *agape* – and to know as we have been known — and, therefore, to abandon ourselves to the holiness of divine desire.

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