

A Lutheran Perspective of the Nexus Between Justification and Sanctification in the Context of Holistic Mission with Reference to the Application of Spiritual Gifts

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Introduction – Identity and Practice

We are dealing with a very vital question on Lutheran identity and practice in reference to spiritual gifts. Identity plays significant role in determining how we understand and experience the world (our Christian experience), as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges we face. World Lutheran identity has evolved over the centuries, in that it has embraced a flexi model in its journey of becoming a communion of Churches. In the global context the reinterpretation process has ideologically and theologically given birth to various identity forms validated as Lutheran. These forms carry within them a conservative outlook or a moderate outlook or a more liberal outlook. While there may be lesser theological complexities in dealing with the doctrine of justification, but as we tread into the realm of sanctification, here differences and complexities are inevitable. Obviously within the Lutheran confessional documents and writings, there is sufficiency in establishing a sound theological basis for reflection on Pneumatology. However difficulty may arise when it comes to balancing theology with practice – knowledge with experience. Here I want to reaffirm that we have been freed and formed, with a purpose. Thus we have been entrusted with a responsibility and call to holistic mission; namely, to fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Therefore practice of our Christian-Lutheran faith ought to take into consideration this purpose and consider the application of spiritual gifts as gifts of grace endowed by Christ through the Spirit to the Church.

As a basis and foundation to the Lutheran perspective in the application of spiritual gifts within the missional context, we may need to consider briefly the theological location of Lutheran Pneumatology as a holistic approach in the offering and application of the treasure of salvation.

Beyond Justification and Leading to Formation - Offering and Applying the Treasure of Salvation

Lutheran theology generally understands the work of the Spirit in terms of 'offering' and 'applying' the treasure of salvation. The 'offering' is to be placed in the context of justification, the 'applying' is related to the post-justification state or sanctification process. Hence, justification is an unrepeatable event but sanctification is a process involving daily experiences and walk in faith through the power of the Spirit starting with baptism and regeneration.

Baptism and Regeneration

This has always been a thorny issue in baptismal theological debates. Does baptism offer regeneration? Reformation theology with its understanding of 'justification by faith alone and grace alone' supported the notion that baptism does hold regenerative capabilities. Hence, infant baptism seemed less of an issue within such context. However, theologies that reject the notion of baptismal regeneration would opt for believer's baptism.

The Work of the Holy Spirit - Location in Lutheranism

In Lutheran Theology the work of the Holy Spirit is generally considered along with a person's reconciliation with God and application of redemptive benefits. It would incorporate themes such as election, union with Christ, regeneration, conversion, justification and sanctification.

Luther could not have been more precise in stating the work of the Holy Spirit as may be found in his concluding remarks of his interpretation of Psalm 117 (revised edition). He concluded this 1930 document (addressed to Hans von Sternberg) by stating: *"But God, our dear Father, who through His dear Son and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has so richly enlightened us – may he strengthen us with perfect faith through His Holy Spirit and give us power to follow His light faithfully and diligently, and praise and extol Him, both in teaching and in life."*¹ Noticeably, central theological themes related to the work of the Spirit are so intricately woven into a single statement pregnant with meaning. The same is expressly mentioned in article XI of the Epitome in the context of 'election'. "In addition he promises the power and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine assistance for steadfastness and eternal life."² ***In summary Luther and the***

Confessions corporately understand the work of the Spirit in terms of `offering' and `applying' the treasure of salvation. In justification, the 'offering' "takes place through the preaching of the Word...God reveals his will in this way, and that in those who He thus calls He will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved. For the Word through which we are called is a ministry of the Spirit." ³ (cf. Jn.10:27-28/ 2Cor.3:8/ Rom.1:16) Similarly, in the post justification context it is again the Spirit who "testifies to the elect that they are `children of God (Rom.8:16)" ⁴ and ensure those who are decreed "pray and give thanks, are sanctified in love, have hope, patience, and comfort in afflictions (Eph.1:11, 13, Rom.8:25)." ⁵ For deeper appreciation of the subject (work of the Spirit) and location in Lutheran theology, it would be helpful to view it under the following sub-headings: **Witness, Comforter and Enabler.**

The Work of the Spirit – Formation of a Witness to the Gospel

In Lutheran theology the 'offering and application' of the gift of salvation is first considered on a communicative level. Here the Spirit of God plays the crucial role in communicating the will of God (John 16:5-16). As the Spirit of Truth, His mission is to guide people into truth, which is basically knowledge of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:9). Luther in his preface to the Second Psalm (March 1532) offers a brief observation (which he would of course clarify later in the main text later) concerning the operative mode of the Spirit. Here Luther draws focus on the Word and worship as chief communicative elements.⁶ We may even want to understand Luther at this point as saying Word is indeed worship, since the Spirit is present. Luther cross-refers to Acts 4:25 in his study of the Second Psalm to assert this key notion and indicates that it is the key function of the Holy Spirit to witness concerning God and his will. This thought further receives a heightened emphasis in Luther's interpretation of Psalm 3, 8 and 51. In these sections too the concept of the Holy Spirit as the communicator or revealer of God is gradually developed into a christocentric framework. While nature revealed God in a `general way' (*revelatio generalis*), the Spirit reveals God in Christ in a `special' way (*revelatio specialis*).

To Luther these "are divine and heavenly doctrines. Unless they are taught by the Great Spirit, they cannot enter the heart of man."⁷ Such testimony as borne by the Spirit is an important work of the Spirit in Lutheran theology, since in absence of it human beings are eternally lost. Truth "cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit for they are abysses of divine wisdom in which the reason is completely submerged and lost."⁸ The `gate-keeping' imagery used by Luther in his

interpretation of Psalm 68, is yet another expression of the role of the Spirit. “For if God does not open and explain the Holy Writ, no one can understand it, it will remain a closed book enveloped in darkness.”⁹

Work of the Spirit - Comforter in the Context of Spiritual Warfare

Our second point concerns the work of the Spirit as the Comforter. Both the Lutheran Confessions and Luther agree that this function of the Spirit should not be just understood solely in utilitarian terms; consolation in the midst of emotional sadness or worry. It encompasses a much wider theological perspective with regenerative implications. It would then include such themes as ‘Law and Gospel’ and ‘Sin and Grace’. To comfort is to preach about grace and the gracious disposition of God. As elucidated in the Formula of Concord, the context of comfort is depravity and its tormenting effects. “For the Gospel and Christ are not ordained and given us to terrify or to condemn us, but to comfort and lift upright those who are terrified and disconsolate.”¹⁰ Similarly, the Augsburg Confession emphasizes that “faith is no idle knowledge, nor can it exist with mortal sin, but it is a work of the Spirit that frees us from death, comforting and quickening terrified minds.”¹¹

Luther also refers to this comforting role of the Spirit in his interpretation on Psalm 118:6. The context here is spiritual and eternal joy as characteristic features of the Spirit. Luther notes, comfort “does not come to us without the Word, which the Holy Spirit effectively calls to mind and enkindles in our hearts, even though it has been heard ten years.”¹² Luther in synonymy with the Confessions views ‘comforting’ in the context of ‘sin management’. Recognizing the vital connective element between the ‘comforting of the Spirit’ and the ‘Word’ (the operative means of the Spirit) in ‘spiritual jubilation’ is an important location Lutheran theology. True jubilation or celebration is when sin, death and devil are collectively and effectively dealt with.

Since the struggle or ‘spiritual warfare’ between ‘Old Adam and the ‘New Adam’ is a biblical reality, the Spirit’s aid cannot be ignored but only depended upon. “Thus the weakness of our own flesh and Old Adam are also in the picture, so that on every hand it becomes difficult and labors to remain steadfast and to await the end. That is why the Holy Spirit has much work to do and comfort his own.”¹³ It is a process whereby the believer is constantly aided in remaining faithful witnesses and performers of good deeds. The Church being a community nurtured by the Spirit, is therefore endowed the designation ‘holy community’ or sanctified people. “Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. By it he creates and increases sanctification,

causing it daily to grow and become strong in faith and in the fruit of the Spirit.”¹⁴ Further, empowering them with spiritual gifts in enabling them to be credible witnesses.

d) The Work of the Spirit – Enabler (Holistic Missiological Formation)

Our third consideration concerns the enabling function of the Spirit. **It is here that we may find a crucial meeting point in the exercise of the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit.** In Lutheran theology as we tread on from the justification scene and cross into the territory of ‘good works’, the enabling character of the Spirit is clearly illuminated.

Therefore we could say without creating any theological doubt, that Luther and the Confessions regarded holy and responsible Christian living with great concern. Holy living is addressed in the context of good works and answers the question; ‘what makes a person holy in the sight of God and induces godliness? The Confessional statement “God is not to be taken lightly”¹⁵ is loaded with meaning in terms of Christian responsibility and virtue. Holiness and godliness are tied up with obedience to God; not as optional but mandatory. It is in fact a sign of faith. “We do not overthrow the law, Paul says (Rom.3:31), but uphold it; for when we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruit of the Spirit gradually increase.”¹⁶ The enabling activity of the Holy Spirit induces positive obedience thus continuing the sanctificatory process in ensuring production of good works, virtuous living and empowering credible witnesses.

Here we could observe the vital role of spiritual gifts in helping to fulfill the missiological task (Luke 6:20-23). To summarize the Confessional thought it may be useful to quote from Luther’s preface to the Epistle of Romans.

Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Therefore, faith is living, busy, active and mighty, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good. Likewise, faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active...It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat from light and light from fire.”¹⁷

Thus far we have noted that in Lutheran Pneumatology that aspects on sin management, spiritual warfare, empowerment, holiness, good works are only

possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. Here the exercise of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit in a constructive and progressive manner would result in victorious Christian life. Hence, as we continue to live and serve, it is important that Lutherans in so elucidating the work of the Spirit also hold in proper balance the centrality of the Word, Trinity and Christocentrism. I believe these key standpoints are important for our reflection on the use of spiritual gifts as we endeavour to enhance our Lutheran identity.

Need to Affirming Essentiality of Spiritual Gifts in Mission

Spiritual gifts are divine tools provided for mission and the Scriptures lend ample support to confirm this. This would include gifts mentioned in Romans 12, 1Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4. From the above biblical texts (not to be taken as an exhaustive list) we could note how endowment of gifts is placed within the framework of God's grace and divine will. Although some may doubt the necessity of such manifestations for the modern church, nevertheless as witnessed by the Scriptures, it must be agreed the Early Church experienced enormous blessings through exercise of spiritual gifts. Again, it needs to be reiterated, contrary to narrow orthodox notions, that any theological suggestions that presuppose the withdrawal of spiritual gifts from the church or limit its function to the Early Church needs to be reconsidered. The following verses attest to the legitimacy of this thesis.

- ***"For even as the body is one and yet has many members and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." 1Corinthians 12:12***

Here Paul uses the vivid body metaphor¹⁸ to explain the nature and function of spiritual gifts. He finds it useful to understand the coordinate functioning of the body, with its diverse¹⁹ nature, as the best possible model for the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church. This coordinate functioning is made possible only because every part in the body is functioning as one entity. Paul's frequent usage of 'many' and 'one' in 1Corinthians 12, sets forth the idea that his interest rests in affirming unity within in diversity. As Pfitzner the eminent New Testament scholar from Luther Seminary, Adelaide, suggests, "The Corinthians knew this diversity well enough, so the real point is not the variety of gifts and members, but the oneness of the Church."²⁰ If

the body metaphor of Paul is understood well and applied, the exercise of spiritual gifts will no longer remain a thorny issue.

- ***"But now God has placed the members, each one of them in the body as He desired." 1Corinthians 12:18***

In the above verse Paul not only state the importance of spiritual gifts but also the need to discern the source and origin of such gifts. Such emphatic notion, that spiritual gifts are apportioned according to divine wisdom, grace and choice is characteristically Pauline. The Corinthian church is therefore exhorted to understand this principle. As Greene notes, "Paul here states the flawless, perfect plan of Almighty God – omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent – He who knows the end from the beginning. God knows each individual. He knows our ability, our limitation..."²¹ Hence Paul's body metaphor needs to be interpreted as implying there can be neither envy nor arrogance in the exercise of gifts, since these gifts are gifts of grace. For Paul, each member is unique with his or her own gift and none goes without endowment or empty. This thought, while liberating us of the worry or envy, also assures that none ²² has too much or too little.

- ***"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." Ephesians 4:7 / 12***

Endowment of spiritual gifts is a matter of Divine grace and Paul finds it necessary to reiterate this point. To him the "ultimate end for which Christ gave his gifts is the building up of the body of Christ; to this end, the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry is the divinely appointed means."²³ The Spirit's sovereignty over the gifts attest, that spiritual gifts are gifts of grace; unearned and unmerited. The above points direct us to agree on the necessity and validity of spiritual gifts within the church. In Paul's understanding here, the whole church and every church is certainly 'charismatic', that is if 'charismatic' refers to presence of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. Understanding and applying gifts correctly is a practical question, which then requires spiritual prudence and personal care.

Possible Challenges

- **Fear factor** - There can be varied experiences in the Spirit, while affirming that all permitted practices and rites must warrant sufficient biblical validation. But the Lutheran Church could be open to work of miracles, supra-rational signs and wonders etc.
- **Preoccupation** - The Lutheran Church cannot remain inward looking and preoccupied in promoting its brand of spirituality and worship culture alone.
- **Maintaining a Perceptive Balance** – The perceptive balance between preaching the *Law and Gospel, Grace and Good Works, Great Commission* and Great Commandment is vital.
- **Failure to Reform** - Traditional approaches and theologies are not wrong but could become out-modelled and therefore need to be constantly evaluated, reformed and re-expressed.

Questions for Discussion

1. Should speaking in Tongues be allowed to be practiced in the Lutheran Church worship?
2. How do you understand the relevance of Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit in mission and ministry?
3. The traditional Church tends to look at Church and ministry from the vantage point of Good Friday, while the Churches that actively promote the use of spiritual gifts tend to view Church and ministry from the vantage point of Easter. Discuss

Notes:

¹Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. *Luther's Works (Vol.14) - Selected Psalms III*, St.Louis, Condordia Publishing House, 1958, p.39.

²Tappert, G. Theodore. *The Book of Concord, Epitome:Formula of Concord: XI:8*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959, p.495.

³*Ibid.*, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: XI:29, p.621.

⁴*Ibid.*, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: XI:73, p.628

⁵*Ibid.*, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: XI:30, p.621

⁶Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. *Luther's Works (Vol.12) - Selected Psalms I*, St.Louis, Condordia Publishing House, 1955, p.4.

⁷Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. *Luther's Works (Vol.12) - Selected Psalms I*, St.Louis, Condordia Publishing House, 1955, p.303.

⁸Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. *Luther's Works (Vol.12) - Selected Psalms I*, St.Louis, Condordia Publishing House, 1955, p.266.

⁹Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. *Luther's Works (Vol.13) - Selected Psalms II*, St.Louis, Condordia Publishing House, 1956, p.17.

¹⁰Tappert, G. Theodore. The Book of Concord, *op.cit.*, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: V:12, p.560.

¹¹Tappert, G. Theodore. The Book of Concord, *op.cit.*, Apology:IV:115.p.123.

¹²Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. **Luther's Works (Vol.14) - Selected Psalms III**, St.Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1958, p.62.

¹³Pelikan, Jaroslav. ed. **Luther's Works (Vol.13) - Selected Psalms II**, St.Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956, p.179.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Luther's Large Catechism: Second Part:52, p.417.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Luther's Large Catechism: First Part :149, p.385.

¹⁶Tappert, G. Theodore. The Book of Concord, *op.cit.*, Apology:XX:14, p.229.

¹⁷Tappert, G. Theodore. The Book of Concord, *op.cit.*, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: IV: 12, p.553.

¹⁸Body Metaphor - Paul is here using the human body to illustrate the one true Church and its function." Greene, B.Oliver. **The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians**, (Greenville, The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1968), p. 400.

¹⁹Diverse - "The congregation of believers and the human body are each an entity in-diversity". Barnett, Paul. *op.cit.*, p.231.

²⁰Pfitzner, V.C. First Corinthians, *op.cit.*, p.195.

²¹Greene, B.Oliver. *op.cit.*, p.404.

²²None - "Each divine person - God the Lord and the Holy Spirit has gifted each member and 'appointed' each 'member' for a distinctive ministry to the whole, just as He has decided" Barnett, Paul. *op.cit.*, p.233.

²³Strelan, G John. **Ephesians**, *op.cit.*, p.55.