

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS FOR THE 'COMMON GOOD': A MISSION PERSPECTIVE OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

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The topic under study is related to the theology of the Holy Spirit as practiced in the early church under the guidance of mentors like the Apostle Paul. In the context of the Church at Corinth, it raises issues of practicing the gifts of the Spirit for the faith development of individuals for social participation of individuals and groups to experience the power of God while committing to the kingdom of God. This has a visible mission perspective which is the commitment of this writer. This article is a personal reflection shared with an intention to create and raise commitment of love and care among communities.

The context of 1-Corinthians: This Epistle came from the pen of the Apostle Paul along with letters to the church at Thessalonica as the earliest New Testament documents. The young churches were establishing as communities of faith and practice and faced challenges to have correct doctrine and related issues sorted out as timely guidance from their leaders.

The church at Corinth first of all faced the challenge of unity. (Chapter one). The disunity was caused by the inclination of the early Christians to take up individual Apostles as leaders over and against others, thus creating schisms leading to group- mindedness, forming groups to oppose others. To strengthen the belief of the believers in God and his Son and his Spirit, St. Paul introduces the Holy Spirit as the power of God and calls them to have confidence in the person and teaching of the Apostle. (1-Cor 2:5, 10-14). Highlighting the Kingdom of God as the power of God and not of human words, Paul shows his commitment to the Gospel of Christ. (4: 15, 20). He also believes and assures the early Christian community that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit who was given to them by the Father; and the Spirit lives among them. (6:19). In the background of Corinthians' weak social ethics like loose marriage practices and eating food (meat) offered to idles and gender imbalance, Paul reminds them of Christian faith in one God and one Lord Jesus Christ (8:6).

In the second half of Chapter 11, he challenged the so-called love feast of the church at Corinth which ended up with a greedy attitude and encouraged them to observe and celebrate the sacrament of Eucharist and related ceremonies in consideration of others around the tables. (11:33). This has implications for churches all over today to revisit their doctrine of the Spirit and his gifts for the broader participation in Church life to benefit God's world for the fullness of God's glory.

In this background, Paul encourages the church at Corinth to reflect upon their doctrine of the Spirit and understanding of the gifts related to him.

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT:

There is a variety of the gifts of the Spirit, nine as a recognized list; word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and interpreting different tongues. A thoughtful reflection should help to understand Holy Spirit as their source, their diversity and impact on the receiver and benevolence for general public-coming from God. This sequential of the Spirit is clearly divinely manifested act of God, a great blessing for the world through the commitment and service of the Christian in the Spirit. (12:7).

So, the gifts of the Spirit are not handed over as a cluster of divine virtues but as a one single blessing on the Christian to thankfully work them. They are given as the Spirit's manifestation and not the receivers spiritual exaltation over others.

This has an immediate mission perspective that the gifts of the Holy Spirit to individuals and groups are to benefit community/society. They are not for personal spiritual pride but for the service to others. They are to be celebrated in the spirit of love and care. The gifts are spread over the individuals as to one message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge, to another faith, to another gifts of healing, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between tongues and to still to another interpretation of tongues. St. Paul has clearly said, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as the Spirit determines" (12: 11). First, he says that different gifts are given to different persons in the Church and second, they are given by the one and same Spirit and third that it is the Spirit's choice and discretion the way He distributes them to different people.

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The strategic purpose of this giving of the blessings of the Spirit to impact the community in St. Paul's view is to build the Church as a body of different parts

because in baptism all become one and the Holy Spirit is provided as one Spiritual commodity (12:12-14).

HOW THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE GIVEN AND RECEIVED

1. Jesus' coming and vocation as the Son of God was influenced by the Spirit and its gifts. Jesus did not receive them as the believers receive them. Jesus stands an example for the believers that while Jesus is one in Trinity with the Spirit, still he upholds the coming of the Spirit and appreciates the impact of the gifts coming with the Spirit from the Father. Luke has recorded the event when Jesus was filled with the Spirit in joy and praised God for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom on children (Youngs) and hiding them from the wise. Jesus declares that only those people know God on whom he would reveal God the Father (Luke 10:21-22). St. Luke has earlier recorded Jesus returning from his overcoming Devils temptations and committing to his vocation to preach the good news of the Kingdom to the poor and the oppressed (Luke 4: 16-19)- fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-2. This was fulfilled as the Spirit was given and received. This came in connection with Jesus' preaching of the favoured hour of God for the world- the climax of the God's own mission of sending Jesus to be the Saviour of the world. This is what the Church preaches and lives for. Isaiah 42:1 is God's declaration that His heart was happy with his chosen one and that he sent his Spirit upon him. Importantly this spirit came upon the Messiah of God to establish peace on earth to benefit all nations for which truthfulness is the visible virtue.
2. The Spirit comes as the divine promise of the Father in heaven (Acts 1:4). This comes in the background of Joel 2:28-32). Prophet Joel's vision was pragmatic and focused on Eschaton-the end time. The prophecy of the young people, visions of the older people, the Spirit's coming on all including the male and female slaves would come as wonders of God on earth and those who would have name of God shall be saved. This holds a mission perspective.
3. Acts Chapter 2 is focused on the coming of the Spirit received by the disciples with the gift of speaking in tongues and interpreting the tongues. This great event includes missionary sermon of St. Peter which became a reason of the conversion of 3000 people, a large number to start with.

Many healing accounts of Jesus are recorded with a mention of the Spirit as the power of God and the tangible existence and coming of the Kingdom of God. e.g. (Matthew 12:28). God gives individual Christian his Holy Spirit to maintain holiness in his or her life, says St. Paul (1 Thess 4:7). Holiness has both personal and social implications.

The Holy Spirit is God's presence and power with full divine authority to help humans act as God's hands to work for the goodness which God brings to earth despite human rebellion.

SOME MAJOR FACTORS AND ASPECTS OF COMMON GOOD AND MISSION COMMITMENT

Following may be short listed aspects of what is commonly known as 'common good'. First comes peace, then justice. The issue of equality with a commitment to integrity and dignity of all people along with the development and progress of communities leading to transformation combating poverty and related aspects of betterment are among the key considerations to address the notion under discussion. Rehabilitation of people with odd behaviours and situations like drug addicts and mentally and physical handicapped is also a consideration in the discussion on common good.

We are considering only those aspects of 'Common good' which have conceptual and theological bases. The other aspects of social welfare are important, but we are not discussing them because of shortage of space here.

What is the level of the commitment of the Christian who in a way feels proud to claim a gift of the Spirit for the weaker members of the community. How does the message of wisdom speak to the issues of social concern?

How do we see the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on individual Christian with specific gift of the spirit especially one from among the nine mentioned above to help bringing about peace and justice in a local community where he or she lives with surety of provision of amenities like clean water, electricity and gas for cooking, also making sure that education is a provision in the range of all children. And how the gifted Christian engage with those who are oppressed and do not have equal opportunities of jobs and whose integrity and dignity is rolled down every day for the sake of their daily wages.

What is the level of the commitment of the Christian who in a way feels proud to claim a gift of the Spirit for the weaker members of the community. How does the message of wisdom speak to the issues of social concern? Equally the message of knowledge which comes under the fear of God has great potential for social change. The third gift of the spirit is described as 'faith' which raises and maintains the level of commitment for the salvation and well being of people we engage at our work and dwelling places. It also

encourages the believer to have faith in themselves of their capacity and others to have collaboration of any activity for the common good. This brings witness to the gospel because Jesus prayed for his disciples (John Chapter 17) to have faith in him as the one who gives eternal life. Gift of healing may involve prayerful concern of the Christian for the healing of those who are physically sick. Jesus prayed for the sick and healed them. Do Christians have a calling to do that? Healing of the whole person becomes a reality under the power of the Spirit. It is also healing of relationship among the community and families, thus maintaining a spirit of unity.

The use of miraculous power as in the case of Jesus and the believer is not to perform wonders for personal glory but bringing peace and love and reconciliation. Prophecy is an activity of the Spirit which is shared with the believer for the common good by reflection on the daily human situation and speak against the exploitative structures which oppress the poor and resourceless. This involves a spirit of sharing God's intention. Distinguishing between spirits as given as a gift of the Spirit is a spirit of discernment between the good and bad ministries. Good and bad trees who bear good and bad fruit. This helps distinguishing among the intentions of humans how they come up to involve in others' affairs.

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Speaking in different tongues is a unique gift of the Spirit which helps the believers to speak the language of the people. What is needed and what is desired need to be distinguished and a genuine commitment is shown for the wellbeing of all. Finally interpreting different kinds of tongues. This may involve making the members of a community understandable to others, thus developing an atmosphere of mutual respect and honoring one another in common commitment for the kingdom values. It is importantly good to have this realization that along with personal blessing, the gifts of the Spirit have social perspective. Once we are aware of that we may be able to commit afresh to mission commitment of wellbeing of those who are underprivileged. The nine-fold gifts of the Spirit cover all aspects of individual and social life. This shows the fullness of the Spirit of God.

Christian commitment for the common good is a mission commitment. It is carried out joyfully in the fellowship of believers. This happened among the early Christians. St. Luke records the event when they prayed and the room moved where they were and they all were filled with the Holy Spirit and they

preached the Word of God bravely. (Acts 4:31). This is followed by the description of the coherence of early Christian communities who were filled with the Spirit were one heart and soul and they all shared their resources among themselves, and nobody claimed their sources for themselves but shared with others voluntarily. And no one was a destitute among them because they shared their resources with others through the Apostles and God's grace was upon them. (Acts 4:32-35). This kind of caring attitude emerged as a result of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Individual and group of Christians in Jerusalem.

The experience of the Holy Spirit by the Christian believers is not just speaking in strange tongues which no one understands, but to speak the language of the community they live in and give glory to God in a vernacular. Jesus under the power of the Spirit ministered to people. He taught them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He gave more practical and tangible interpretations of the law-different from the Pharisees. Therefore, people marveled at his person and works.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of divine promise for the disciples (believers) to be witnesses of Christ. (Acts 1:8). St. Paul has described the coming of the Spirit to control the believers with regard to their living in God for God's glory and for the benevolence of the people and not to gratify human nature. I would like to conclude with a passage from St. Paul's letter to Romans Chapter 8.

" You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet, your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit , who live in you". (Roman 8:9-11).



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