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## THE HOLY SPIRIT ESTABLISHES THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

The meaning of this text can be found in many other places in the Bible. In those places, however, we do not have the problem we have here. Here it is hard to understand how this text agrees with basic Christian doctrine. It is therefore worth the effort to explain how what is said here is found in almost all gospel readings.<sup>1</sup>

The text is part of the wonderful sermon given by the Lord Christ to his disciples after the Last Supper. In that he was soon to depart, he wanted to console them. He was

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<sup>1</sup> By 'gospel readings' what is meant are the selections from the four gospels that are read each week publicly in worship.

about to die, leaving them behind, alone, and in danger and peril. For the sake of Christ, the disciples would suffer the world's enmity, persecution and death.

Christ tells the disciples that they would be banished. Those that killed them would boast that they had served God by doing so. Hearing these things, the disciples were disheartened, terrified, and greatly saddened. They were about to lose their Lord and be left in great misery and terrible difficulty.

The disciples had to be comforted. Christ does so diligently and faithfully throughout the three chapters of his last sermon. How? Christ promises to send the disciples the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would alleviate the want caused by his absence. The Holy Spirit would not only comfort and strengthen their hearts, but would initiate the kingdom of Christ and spread it throughout the world!

Christ tells them how his kingdom would be and of what it would consist. He also explains what the Holy Spirit would accomplish within the world through them. This is why Christ says first of all: "I know and clearly see, my dear disciples that you are frightened and saddened because I have told you that I am leaving you."

"Yet," Christ continues, "this is your consolation: It simply is true that it is much better for you that I leave. My absence will actually be beneficial. Instead of my visible presence, you will enjoy the comfort of the Holy Spirit. You will also receive his power, as he will accomplish through you, what I now, while I am with you, cannot accomplish. I was sent to you bodily so that I could suffer and die. I will then go to the Father and send the Holy Spirit to you."

He will do much greater things through you, than what now can be done through me. He will also lay upon you a mighty, precious office and work by which my kingdom will be spread throughout the world.”

Christ explains first what his kingdom on earth would be. He does this to remove the disciples’ long-held delusion of an external worldly

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***He will do much greater things through you than what now can be done through me***

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power and rule in this life over the Jewish people and the entire world. Christ clearly spoke against this delusion. He also said that he wanted to leave the world and be seen no longer.

Yet as Christ dies and leaves the world, he obviously cannot govern and rule in an earthly manner. In other words, he could not rule externally and visibly like earthly kings and emperors.

Christ teaches this clearly by foretelling how the disciples would fare after his departure: They would be hated, persecuted, banned, and also killed by their own people. The disciples also would grieve and cry and be afraid in the world, which consequently, would rejoice and be glad.

None of this would make any sense if the disciples’ hope was for a worldly kingdom on earth. They were rather to expect the opposite. And yet, they were to know that Christ wanted to establish and maintain his kingdom within the world. It is for this purpose then, that Christ promises the Holy Spirit.

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1. Why did Christ wish to comfort his disciples?
  2. What would happen to Christ's disciples after his departure?
  3. With what promise does Christ comfort his disciples?
  4. What would the Holy Spirit do?
  5. Was it better for Christ to leave his disciples?
  6. What was to be Christ's kingdom here on earth?
  7. Would Christ's rule be external and visible?