CONVICTED BY THE **S**PIRIT

Dedicated to the members of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Spring Lake Park, Minnesota

CONVICTED BY THE SPIRIT

FROM MARTIN LUTHER'S

Postil 235 - John 16:8-13

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FOREWORD

Perhaps no other Christian teaching is more misunderstood today than that of the Holy Spirit. Who is He? What does He do? How does He work? Probably no better indication of the confusion that reigns on this topic exists than simply the size of the recently published New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. At nearly 1300 pages (!), this one work on the topic dwarfs the size of many standard works which treat all of Christian doctrine! Why the apparent explosion of interest in the workings of the Holy Spirit? It may not have to do as much with Christian curiosity as with a more secular Enlightenment ideal of freedom of expression. As political systems throughout the world have become more open to individualistic expression in a variety of arenas of life, the institutionalized Christian church throughout the world has been forced to do the same. Thus Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit can be found to vary not only from denomination to denomination, but from congregation to congregation, pastor to pastor, and Christian to Christian.

Secondarily, this state of affairs has occasioned somewhat of a begrudging acceptance within mainstream Christianity

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¹ Revised and Expanded Edition, Ed. By Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

of teachings concerning the Holy Spirit that traditionally have been the fodder of fringe movements. Pastors of even the most traditional of Christian denominations therefore no longer are startled by the claims of a parishioner to be able to speak in tongues or to have received direct revelations from God. The pastor may still not believe the parishioner, but is no longer surprised by such claims as would pastors of generations past have been.

Of what help, then, is this book? Does Martin Luther bring anything new to the table? Well, yes. Instead of explaining the Holy Spirit via his outpouring (Acts 2), his gifts in general (1 Corinthians 12) and specific (1 Corinthians 14), or his fruit (Galatians 5) Luther instead, using John 16, explains the overarching purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit of which such specific manifestations are only a part. In John 16 one finds the words of Christ himself who outlines, if we can put it that way, the program of the Holy Spirit, and that is, that he would be sent to the disciples in order that the world in these End Times would be convicted of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.

Still even more startling to the modern Christian: The role of the Holy Spirit in matters that trouble the conscience. So common has become the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit is revealed only in pleasant or pleasing ways, it may be hard for the contemporary Christian to accept the Holy Spirit's work in pointing out sin by means of the law of God. What Christian has every enjoyed a negative reaction to the sharing of the Word of God? Yet as Luther demonstrates, the convicting which causes such reactions is also part of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps most intriguing, however, is the apocalyptic environment in which Luther views the work of the Holy Spirit. His work does not occur in a vacuum, but in these End Times, between the ascension of Christ into heaven and his return on the Last Day. That being the case, it is a work which continues the preaching of Christ himself until he returns visible in power and great glory. Here there is no distinction made between first century Judea and the rest of time. Instead, there is a continuum of proclamation up unto the present day and certainly until the end of the world. In short, the work of the Holy Spirit is to prepare mankind for that day.

Paul Strawn

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"AND WHEN THE [HELPER] (OMES, HE WILL (ONVICT THE WORLD OF SIN AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OF JUDGMENT. OF SIN, THAT THEY DO NOT BELIEVE IN ME. OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THAT I GO TO THE FATHER, AND YOU WILL NO LONGER SEE ME. OF JUDGMENT, SINCE THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD IS JUDGED.

I STILL HAVE MANY THINGS TO TELL YOU; BUT YOU (ANNOT BEAR IT NOW. YET WHEN THE (OMFORTER, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WILL (OME, HE WILL GUIDE YOU INTO ALL TRUTH."

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JOHN 16:8-13

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.¹

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

¹ 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.

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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

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

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.

- 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?