

PNEUMATOLOGY (35)

In order to understand how unique this age really is, it is necessary to see some peculiar features of this present age:

Feature #1 - This present age is an intercalation .

What this means is that this present Church Age was inserted into the Old Testament prophetic program pertaining to Israel . This age was unforeseen and unaccounted for in all Old Testament predictions. The anticipation of the Old Testament was that the future would feature Israel immediately entering her kingdom . In fact, the Apostle Peter records that the O.T. prophets, even though at times were actually writing about the suffering of Jesus Christ, which would bring about salvation, had no understanding as to what they were writing (I Pet. 1:10-12). The prophets themselves anticipated a Messiah who would deliver the nation to the kingdom, not suffer and die for salvation. Even after Christ had suffered, died, arose and ascended, and even after the Spirit of God had come to indwell the believer, there was still uncertainty about this age (Acts 15:6-18).

When we read such things in Scripture, we cannot help but conclude that this present age took the entire theological world by surprise. As Dr. Chafer says of this age, “the present dispensation is not only unforeseen by prophets of old (cf. I Pet. 1:10-11), but is wholly unrelated to that which went before and as wholly unrelated to that which follows” (Vol. 6, p. 81).

Feature #2 - This present age has a new purpose .

There is a very unique divine purpose for this age, which will not be found in any other—to call out people for God’s name, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles . This purpose is carefully discussed and developed in many N.T. passages: Acts 15:14; Rom. 3:9, 29-30; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:11-18.

When this age ends, the focus once again will be upon Israel (Rev. 7:4-8). But this present age is one in which the Bride of Christ is being formed out of both Jews and Gentiles .

Feature #3 - This present age has the peculiarity of witnessing .

When God was specifically working with Israel, there was no Gospel to proclaim and no great commission to be carried out. Israel was not involved in carrying out some “missionary enterprise,” although as a nation she certainly made a powerful statement for God.

Even when Jesus Christ was here, He limited His ministry to Israel and purposely did not reach out to Gentiles (Matt. 15:24). When He sent His disciples out to minister, He restricted their ministry to Israel (Matt. 10:1-6, 7-42).

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However, just before He left this earth, He commanded these same disciples to take the Gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15). Later, the Apostle Paul realized that this responsibility of preaching to others in the world was something committed to him (II Cor. 5:18-19). Paul was so burdened with his calling to preach God's Gospel to the world that he said, "...for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

All of this leads to the proper conclusion that this present age has a very distinctive mandate which is to proclaim the Word of God, especially in unlocking the message of the saving grace of God found in Jesus Christ. This message is to reach out beyond the boundaries of Israel to the whole world.

Feature #4 - This present age is distinct in that there is a blindness in Israel .

During this present age, no Jewish covenants are being fulfilled and there is a temporary blindness upon Israel, so that, as a nation, it is not responding to God. This blindness has been ordained by God (Rom. 11:8), and during this time God is allowing His program to include Gentiles (Rom. 11:11). Israel has not been forsaken by God nor forgotten by God, and God makes it clear that He has preserved a remnant from Israel (Rom. 11:5).

This is the only age in which this blindness is given, and, as a result, this is the only age when God's program is not totally focused on Israel as a nation. Although Israel is and always will be the "apple of God's eye," and although God still blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse her, Dr. Chafer's evaluation of this age is accurate: "This is the one peculiar age in which there is 'no difference' between Jew and Gentile, though in former times God Himself had instituted the most drastic distinction between these two classes of people" (Vol. 6, p. 83).

Feature #5 - This present age is distinct in that it has a special level of evil .

There is, in this present age, a unique level of evil which is clearly biblically sanctioned. It is, in part, this truth that establishes a unique work of the Holy Spirit .

- 1) Paul identified this present age as an evil age. Gal. 1:4
- 2) Christ, in His parables, illustrated that the age of "seed sowing" would be characterized by a unique growth of evil (Matthew 13).
- 3) Paul said that there is, in this age, a form of lawlessness which is similar to that which will exist worldwide during the Tribulation (II Thess. 2:7-9).
- 4) Both Paul and Peter teach that during this age, individual believers are at war with Satan and his demons (Eph. 6:10-11; I Pet. 5:8).
- 5) The Scriptures clearly identify Satan as the "god of this age" (II Cor. 4:3-4).
- 6) As we move toward the end of this age, evil intensifies (II Tim. 3:1-7).

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- 7) The fact that this age is one that presents the message of believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, allows for a new level of evil called unbelief or rejection of Jesus Christ and His work on Calvary.

Clearly, from God's Word, this present age is one that features a unique, worldwide level of evil. We admit that every age has featured sin. In fact, we may recall that at one point in time, sin reached such a detestable level that God destroyed the world with a flood. However, since God has promised never to do that again, we must realize that evil has been growing and growing ever since. We must also realize that, except for this age, Israel has been the focal point of the program of God. During all other time periods, the greatest level of satanic activity has been aimed against Israel. Therefore, although Satan is always involved in blinding the world from God's truth, at all other times his work has been specifically focused on Israel. As soon as God put a blindness on Israel and His program spread to other nations, satanic work spread to other nations as well. Satan's focus went from national to individual all over the world. Therefore, this age can clearly be classified as the "age of evil."

Feature #6 - This present age is a distinct age of Gentile privilege .

This age is unique in that this is the age in which Gentiles can have a personal relationship with the Holy God. It was not so in times past (Eph. 2:12). This is a very unique age in which Gentiles can partake of God in a personal and individual way (Rom. 11:25).

Clearly, the Scriptures teach that this present age is a very unique age which requires a very unique work of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION #10 – How does the Holy Spirit work in this present age?

Since this is a very unique age which demands a very unique work of the Holy Spirit, this question is extremely important. In systematizing the answer, it is legitimate to break it down into two categories:

1. The work of the Holy Spirit in the world .
2. The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer .

Category #1 - The work of the Holy Spirit in the world .

When we use the term "world" in this context, we are referring to the Holy Spirit's work as it pertains to this evil world, which includes His work as it relates to fallen angels and to unsaved people.

Primarily there are two ways in which the Holy Spirit works in this lost environment known as "the world":

(Work #1) - The Holy Spirit is the person who is the restrainer .

In this present age, the Holy Spirit is actually restraining evil from breaking loose. He is divinely carrying out this governmental responsibility over angels and people .

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One key passage which teaches us this important truth is II Thess. 2:7. In this verse it is revealed that some person (“he,” not “it”) is restraining iniquity from breaking loose and hindering the revealing of the Antichrist (2:8).

That word “restrain” is one that means to hold back, to detain and to restrain. This word informs us that one member of the Godhead is specifically involved in holding back, detaining and restraining lawless iniquity from totally breaking loose in this world. This divine person is one who is presently in this world, but will be taken out of the world. The Bible clearly teaches us that the member of the Godhead who was sent into this world for this present age was the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 16:7-8). Therefore, it is accurate to conclude the person who is presently holding back evil is the person of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer made an interesting observation when he wrote: “It is clearly implied that were there no restraint in the world the tide of evil would rise to incomprehensible heights. This conclusion accords with the biblical declaration that the human heart is not only ‘desperately wicked’ in itself, but is under the dominion of Satan (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 2:2-3). Over against this evidence, man has contended that he is fundamentally right and needs only to attain to culture, education, and refinement. The hour in which the present restraint is removed from the earth will demonstrate the truthfulness of the Word of God respecting the corruption of the human heart” (Vol. 6, pp. 86-87). Chafer goes on to say, “The removal of the Holy Spirit is the reversing of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost He who had been omnipresent in relation to the world became resident in the world, and when He is removed He who is no resident will be again omnipresent in His relation to the world. This explains the seeming paradox that He who was already here on earth being infinite came on the Day of Pentecost, and He who is removed will still be present” (*Ibid.*, p. 87).

We have no way of knowing just precisely what the extent of the Spirit’s present restraining work is, for the Scriptures do not reveal this to us. We may observe that when men curse God and Christ, they do not curse the Holy Spirit. This is certainly not due to some reverence or respect that lost people have, but is more than likely due to the restraining work of the Holy Spirit, who is present in this world. We do know that the level of evil will be unprecedented in the next age (Rev. 9:20-21; 13:8).

Since the Scriptures reveal that the Spirit lives in each individual believer, and since it is revealed that eventually the Spirit will be removed from this world (II Thess. 2:7), these two key theological truths necessitate the Rapture. Since the Spirit must depart from this world, so must those in this world who have the Spirit in them.

(Work #2) - The Holy Spirit is the person who is the convictor.

Within the Word of God lies the revealed truth of God which clearly asserts that the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8).

The natural unsaved person of this world is not capable, in and of himself, of recognizing his need for salvation or of his need to believe on Jesus Christ. His desperately wicked heart will not seek after God. It is the Spirit of God who has a divinely assigned responsibility of conviction, and those who believe otherwise are in direct contradiction to the revealed truth of God and rob the Holy Spirit of the praise and glory which He deserves in His salvation of a lost soul.

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The special work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the lost is clearly needed and established from the following passages:

1) I Cor. 2:14 - Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer well expounded this verse by saying, “The unsaved in himself cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. To him they are foolishness. He is incapable of even comprehending them. He remains impotent until he is wrought upon by the Holy Spirit” (Vol. 6, p. 20).

2) II Cor. 4:3-4 - These are important verses because they reveal to us that not only are the unsaved blinded because they are lost in this world, but they are blinded to the Gospel with a blindness which has been imposed upon their minds by Satan.

When one admits this important biblical truth, one realizes that no human effort or appeal could ever “lift this veil” of blindness from one who is lost. This blindness demands the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Those misguided believers who think they can “win the lost,” in and of themselves, are greatly lacking in their biblical and theological knowledge. The saving of a lost soul requires the convicting work of the Spirit of God and the fact that Satan blinds the minds of those who are lost only further establishes this reality.

3) John 14:16-17 - It is clearly asserted in these verses that the lost world cannot receive the Spirit because it does not see Him or know Him. It would be well for us to observe that the person asserting this truth is none other than Jesus Christ. It must be assumed that Christ is stressing the great privilege the believer has in having the Spirit of God. The believer did not receive this Spirit because he saw Him, knew Him and responded to Him; but he received Him as a direct sovereign work of God.

4) Ephesians 2:1 - The Word of God states that in the unsaved state, a person is spiritually dead. This context also states that God was the one who brought spiritual life to one spiritually dead (2:4-5). The key agent in this work of God was the Holy Spirit, who convicted the person that he was spiritually dead.

5) John 6:39-40 - The clear teaching of our Lord is that He will save all who will be saved and not lose one person. It is also clearly taught that the determining factor for salvation is to “see or behold the Son” in such a way that one “believes in Him.” Since it is revealed by God that “seeing” the truth is an impossibility for the lost person, it is only the Holy Spirit who can cause one to recognize Jesus Christ as Savior and accept Him.

The words of Dr. Chafer are significant on this matter: “There is an election of the Father’s and not one of these will ever be lost. It is equally true that not every person ‘seeth the Son’ (cf. John 6:40) by that vision which the Holy Spirit engenders; but immediately upon seeing Him as the Answer to every need they will have in time or eternity, the individual whom God thus calls is able to receive Christ as Saviour” (*Ibid.*, p. 91).