

PNEUMATOLOGY (38)

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).

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6) John 6:44 - This passage is explicitly clear; **NO MAN** can come to faith in Jesus Christ unless the Father draws him by His Spirit. God uses His Spirit to draw those whom He will save to Jesus Christ and no man can come to Christ otherwise.

Another passage that refers to the “drawing” work of God is John 12:32. This passage, although perhaps appearing to be a paradox to John 6:44, is in fact a great support. The context of John 12:32 is what permits us to give a proper interpretation to Christ’s point. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem (John 12:12), and the Pharisees were warning the children of Israel that many non-Jews were being drawn to Christ (John 12:19-20). Christ proceeded to inform this Jewish crowd that by His death, He would draw all men, not just Jews, to Himself (John 12:31-32). God’s program was beginning to change and people from all over the world would be drawn to Jesus Christ. In fact, John goes on to say that God blinded the Jew’s eyes and hardened their hearts (12:40). This in no way contradicts John 6:44, it clearly coincides with it. God’s Spirit is presently drawing people from all over the world to believe on Christ and accept His cross-work. All nationalities, all ages, all genders are being brought into the family of God. Those who are being drawn to Christ are being drawn by the convicting work of the Spirit of God and those who aren’t are not the elect of God.

7) I Cor. 1:23-24 - Again this passage designates the impact that the preaching of Jesus Christ has on various people: For those unsaved and not related to Abraham, the Gospel is foolishness . The non-elect Gentile in no way will admit his lack or need for Jesus Christ; in fact, that concept is foolishness to him. For those unsaved and related to Abraham, the Gospel causes them to stumble . They cannot see how a true Messiah could possibly end up hanging on a cross. However, for those “who are the called,” that same message concerning Jesus Christ and His cross-work is seen to be the power and wisdom of God. The divine person who allows this to be understood is the Holy Spirit.

8) Rom. 8:28-30 - No passage in the N.T. can be more powerful than this one, for it most certainly reveals that God sovereignly and providentially not only foreknows, predestinates, calls, justifies and glorifies His elect, but He also works **ALL THINGS** in their lives for good in that He uses all things to conform the believer to looking like His Son, Jesus Christ. This is an amazing statement of divine sovereignty. It will be discovered that the person who is heavily involved in this entire process is none other than the Holy Spirit.

Again, the central purpose of observing these verses is to establish that apart from the convicting work of the Spirit of God, no one in this world would ever be saved. It is an absolute biblical impossibility for one who is lost to, in and of himself, choose to believe on Jesus Christ. This work is the work of the Holy Spirit and to deny this is to deny the Bible. This leads us to the central passage of this study:

9) John 16:7-11 - At first reading of this text, it may be observed that this unique ministry of conviction would be specifically carried on in the age that would follow Christ’s earthly ministry. In other words, this particular ministry was not individually undertaken in any other age of history other than the time which would follow Christ’s ascension. It may also be observed that these words are addressed to believers about unbelievers .

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Jesus Christ is specifically pointing out that the ministry the Holy Spirit would have concerning the lost world, when He would come to the world, is the ministry of conviction. This very point is clearly stated in verse 8—when the Spirit comes into this world, He will "convict" it of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. This word is extremely important, for it defines what the Holy Spirit will do in the heart and mind of one who is unsaved.

The word “convict” (ἐλέγγω) is one that means to convict, to reprove and to expose (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 144). Christ’s point is that when the Spirit of God comes into the world, He will convict, reprove and expose the unbeliever in regard to sin, to righteousness and to judgment. The idea presented by the term conviction is one of showing or enlightening a person as to where his life and thinking are faulty (*Ibid.*, p. 144). This particular word emphasizes a conviction in which the person understands or is enlightened to the point of seeing his lack or need. Dr. Chafer says, “In every instance in which this word appears, the word connotes the impartation of understanding regarding the subject in question” (Vol. 6, p. 94). Dr. Charles Ryrie adds, “The idea of conviction is complex. It involves the conceptions of authoritative examination, of unquestionable proof, of decisive judgment, of punitive power. Whatever the final issue may be, he who ‘convicts’ another places the truth of the case in dispute in a clear light before him, so that it must be seen and acknowledged as truth” (*Basic Theology*, p. 324).

According to this text, the Spirit of God convicts those lost in a three-fold way. If we recall our previous passages, we may easily admit that the need for this type of convicting work is absolutely necessary because the lost person is totally incapable of understanding, perceiving and seeing his true condition in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment, in and of himself.

It is stated that the object of this conviction will be “the world.” There has never been an interpretive problem in identifying “the world” as referring to those who are lost, but there has been discussion concerning the issue of whom, from the lost world, does the Holy Spirit specifically convict.

Dr. Ryrie, for example, says “the world” cannot refer to everyone in the world, since it is a specific conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. When the Spirit of God came into the world, not everyone became personally convicted of these things through some natural revelation, for no lost person is ever convicted of these three elements unless the Holy Spirit does a very unique convicting work. Dr. Ryrie goes on to say that he believes this convicting work refers to many people in the world, some of whom will believe and some of whom won’t (*Ibid.*, pp. 324-325). Dr. Ryrie reasons that since all people will not be saved, some of those lost will be convicted and reject that conviction and all other lost people will not be convicted. In my estimation, Dr. Ryrie is accurate in saying not everyone in the world will be convicted of sin, of righteousness and of judgment by the Holy Spirit. However, he is in error in thinking that God’s Spirit would convict some who are lost and then permit them to stay lost and then not convict others who are lost and let them stay lost.

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The first grammatical point we may observe from our text is that the word “world” contains the article “the.” This means that Jesus Christ had something specific in mind when He said the Spirit will convict “the world.” Greek grammar requires identifying those to whom the article refers, and in order to do that there must always be a careful analysis of the context.

Contextually, Christ had been sharing with His disciples the fact that God’s will for their lives was that they bear “much fruit” (John 15:8, 16). He informed them that as they are doing this, they will discover that they will be “hated” (John 15:18-19), “persecuted” (John 15:20), and excommunicated (John 16:2). Had we been one of these disciples listening to this, our reasoning would have gone something like this—“You have just told us we are to bear fruit and you have also just told us that everywhere we go trying to do this we will be hated and mistreated by the people of this world. How are we to bear this fruit and who will this fruit be since the world hates us?” To this kind of thinking, Christ gives His answer in verses 7-11. The Spirit of God will be your helper. He will convict certain individuals in the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment and thus you will be able to bear fruit, even though the world will hate you and mistreat you. The article “the” refers to those specifically who will be saved, as Dr. Chafer said, it “is restricted to those whom” the Lord our God shall call” (Vol. 6, p. 94). In other words, the Spirit of God convicts all who come to faith in Christ of at least three important realities, thus enabling the disciple to bear fruit:

Reality #1 - The Spirit of God convicts a person of sin. John 16:8a, 9

There are a couple of key observations we need to make regarding a conviction that brings one to salvation and thus is fruit-bearing for the disciple: 1) The word “sin” is singular, not plural (“sin,” not “sins”); 2) The sin is specifically related to unbelief (specifically not believing in Jesus Christ, 16:9).

Prior to Jesus Christ dying on a cross, the sin of “unbelief” in rejecting Him as personal Savior was not possible. In view of this, we may accurately assume from this text that when the Spirit of God convicts a person with the conviction of the Holy Spirit, which will save their lost souls, He does so by convicting the person that Jesus Christ has borne all sin and only by believing on Him will one have everlasting life. The lost unregenerate mind cannot fathom the fact that all sin has been laid on the person of Jesus Christ. Believing this is impossible for one who is unsaved.

However, one who is about to be saved will be one who will experience the convicting work of the Spirit of God in that He will create, in the consciousness of his mind, the personal realization that Jesus Christ died for all sin and that it is **ONLY** by faith in Him that one may have his sins forgiven. Apart from the Spirit’s work of this specific conviction, no one will ever or could ever grasp this point and no one will ever choose, in and of himself, to believe on Jesus Christ. As Dr. Chafer said, an accurate presentation of the Gospel “does not present something for the unsaved to do, it rather presents something for them to believe” (*Ibid.*, p. 96).

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Any person who is truly saved will have been convicted by the Holy Spirit. This conviction will be that Jesus Christ is the only person and only way to being right with a Holy God. This conviction will be such that the person will realize there is nothing he can do about his sin and he will be convicted that his own works cannot ever make him right with God. In this conviction, the Holy Spirit will cause the individual to sense the need to believe on Jesus Christ. A lost person cannot and will not ever come to these conclusions on his own; in fact, he is incapable of understanding this truth. It is only as the Spirit convicts that there will be true salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Reality #2 - The Spirit of God convicts a person of righteousness. John 16:8b, 10

Dr. Chafer made a profound point when he wrote: “This passage presents the one and only instance in all of Christ’s teachings when He speaks directly of imputed righteousness—that righteousness which so far from being a product of human effort and attention is the gift of God (cf. Rom. 5:17), in which the believer is now alone accepted of God (Eph. 1:6), and by which alone any person from this earthly sphere will enter heaven” (*Ibid.*, p. 96).

One might ask, since Christ is no longer present on this earth, how could anyone ever come to the conclusion that the righteousness, which God gives that will make a person right with Him, is only found in Jesus Christ? The only biblical answer to this is by the **convicting** work of the Spirit of God. God’s righteousness may only be found by believing on Jesus Christ. Since Christ has already gone back to heaven and is with the Father, and since no one can see Jesus Christ physically anymore, it takes a miraculous convicting work of God’s Spirit to bring a person to realize and believe this.

Again we cite Dr. Chafer: “It is not contended that the unsaved must comprehend the difficult doctrine of imputed righteousness; it is evident, however, that to put his trust in Christ he must abandon all confidence in self as being able to commend himself to God, and count that all that the condemned sinner will ever need before God is providing and awaiting him in Christ Jesus, who is the righteousness of God. Since such a confidence is so foreign to the life, limitations, and experience of the natural man, it is essential that this vital truth be revealed to the unsaved by the Holy Spirit” (*Ibid.*, p. 96).

If one is going to accurately set forth the Gospel in a way that the Spirit can do His convicting work of salvation, one must include in his message the fact that Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God and the only way one can be right with God is by having His righteousness imputed to the individual who has sinned against God.

This critical theme, which is a major theme of the book of Romans, is, in most presentations of the Gospel, totally neglected. But we can be certain that when we do our best to present it, God’s Spirit can powerfully take this accurate, rightly divided presentation and do His convicting work. It is an understanding of this very point that is evidence that the Holy Spirit is truly drawing another lost soul to Christ through His conviction ministry.