

The Course of This Age

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon explores the significance of understanding Scripture and prophecy in relation to the present age and the influence of Satan on the unregenerate.

Scripture: Matthew 24:37, John 8:44, 1 Corinthians 1:19, 2 Corinthians 4:3, Ephesians 2:2, 2 Timothy 2:15

Topics: "Bible Prophecy", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer emphasizes the importance of rightly dividing the word of truth, warning against a critical attitude that may lead to unbelief and reliance on worldly wisdom. Understanding the divisions and purpose of God's Word is crucial for grasping His providence and the significance of the present age. Chafer highlights the necessity of belief in unfulfilled prophecy, especially in discerning the signs of the times and the imminent fulfillment of predicted events. He stresses the distinction between the heavenly people and the children of the evil one in this age, pointing out the vital relationship between the unregenerate and Satan as revealed in Scripture.

Transcript

It is necessary to distinguish between rightly dividing the word of truth, and a critical attitude toward that word; the former being an important duty in the believer's life, according to II Tim. 2:15, while the latter may easily become a wicked and misleading display of unbelief and the wisdom of this world (I Cor. 1:19).

Personal interest in the Word of God usually begins with the first understanding of its real divisions; and no one is prepared to understand the providence of God who does not first come to know something of the purpose of God as marked off by these great divisions. Especially is this necessary, as has been stated, for any clear understanding of the present age.

Again, the power and force of the whole body of Scripture must depend, in a large measure, upon a belief in unfulfilled prophecy. Such a belief is not general, even among Christians. They believe that Christ came in the flesh, suffered, died, and rose again, because that is all now a matter of history; but that belief is not greatly influenced by the fact that this was all exactly foretold by the prophets. Let those who are free to condemn the pious Jew for not recognizing the fulfillment of prophecy in the first advent of Christ, beware lest they fail to rightly interpret the signs of these times, or look with positive unbelief upon the stupendous events that, according to prophecy, are imminent to-day. It seems a sore test of faith to believe that which is predicted for the present age, though those predictions are being fulfilled in every particular. This prevailing attitude of unbelief usually arises from one of two errors; either Satan has been so estimated

that it seems impossible for him to be the promoter of anything that is moral or good (of this error more will be said in the following chapters): or the exact meaning and purpose of this age has been disbelieved or misunderstood; and because of these conditions many enthusiastic Christians are found to be, not only working toward unscriptural and hopeless ends, but are actually contributing to the confusion and darkness that is prevalent to-day.

The purpose and course of this age are not matters of prediction alone. Almost two thousand years of history may be considered in the light of these predictions; and while the age is not yet complete, and much that is reserved for the last days is still future, enough of prophecy has now been fulfilled to indicate the certain fulfillment of all.

Since there has been no universal conversion of men in even the most favored locality, it is evident that, thus far, there has been a separating and calling out of a few from the many; and the Divine purpose, as revealed in Scripture, which is to gather out a people from the Gentiles for His own name, has been verified. The blessing of God has been upon world-wide evangelism: rather than upon any fruitless attempts at world-wide conversion; for the individual or church that has become self-centered has, to that degree, sacrificed the power and blessing of the presence of Christ which was promised in Matt. 28:20: "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations"--"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age."

Again, the formation of the Kingdom has not been discernible in the present age. The Jews, to whom alone the promises of an earthly kingdom belong, have continued a separate people under the unseen hand of God, without a country, or a vestige of national life. Certainly none of the predicted and necessary events accompanying the establishment of their kingdom have been experienced, nor is there any trace of its promised blessings. The fact that some Jews are now organizing and looking toward their native land, argues nothing for this age, more than that its end is very near, and that the way for their coming Messiah and national glory is being prepared. Just so, the conspicuous fact that all the marvelous present development of the resources of the earth has been limited to about the last eightieth of the present history of the age is evidence that the earth's return to her former glory is already in preparation.

Belief in the revealed course of this age is, therefore, based upon history as well as the predictions of Scripture.

The present age is different from all others by reason of the admixture of opposing classes of people; there being two distinct divisions (not including the Jew as a nation) living and acting together, who are, nevertheless, removed from each other by a degree that is immeasurable. This fact necessitates many careful distinctions and special injunctions which are peculiar to the age.

The fact that these two widely differing classes are present together, and are to continue so to the end of the age, is the teaching of the seven parables in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Very much, therefore, depends upon the correct interpretation of these parables. Their meaning has been somewhat hidden by the use of the word "world" where reference is made to this period of time; and the fact that the conditions described are true of this age only, has not been generally realized.

These seven parables are but a description of the unfolding and development of these mixed elements to be found in Christendom throughout this age. The same program is again proclaimed by Christ, from the Glory, in the messages to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2 and 3). Here are seven letters to organized existing churches; yet these messages also reveal an exact outline of the history of Christendom for this entire age; and there is perfect agreement in order and detail between the parables of Matthew 13 and the

letters of Revelation 2 and 3. The first two parables are interpreted by Christ Himself, and the interpretation of these sheds light on all that remains.

Christ is the sower in both the first and second of these parables, and the sowing is continued by His messengers throughout this age. The field is the world of men, which reveals a marked change from the responsibility of the Jewish age that was then closing; and the results of the sowing are most definite: not all the good seed sown comes to fruitage; and the wheat and the tares grow together until the end of the age. This interpretation is not fanciful, for it is given by Christ Himself; and the following parables must necessarily agree with these. The third and fourth are of the mustard seed and the measure of meal. Though commonly interpreted to mean the world-wide development of the Church and the permeating influence of the Gospel, in the light of the interpretation of the previous parables they can mean only the mixture of evil with that which began as small as a mustard seed and as pure as meal. The fifth parable is of a treasure hid in a field, which pictures the earthly people in the world; while their real relation to Christ is covered until the accomplishment of that which is revealed in the sixth. Here the same man, the Lord Jesus Christ, sells all that He hath to purchase the Church, the pearl of great price, for He "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25); the pearl, by its formation and its power to reflect the light, being a wonderful type of the Church in her present formation and future place in glory. Both the treasure and the pearl are found in the world, but do not include all of the world. The last parable but restates the truth that the mixture of the good and the evil is to continue to the end of the age.

The highest ambition of the great missionary, Paul, was to be all things to all men that he might save some, not all. He found that his preaching was a savor of "death unto death" as well as of "life unto life" (II Cor. 2:15, 16), and he clearly states in II Tim. 3:13, "And evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Christ also predicted that the end of this age should be marked by such sin as provoked the judgment of the flood: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37-39).

This truth is often rejected as being pessimistic and disloyal to the progress of the world: yet has not the history of the age verified the teaching? And is not the coming glory nearer and more certain when depending upon His promised return in resistless power and splendor, than when depending upon any human progress the world has ever known? One is the majestic movement of the Divine program in fulfillment of every covenant: while the other is the vain dream of the world in its ignorance and disregard of the testimony of God.

Because of the presence of these two classes in the world in this age, there are two very distinct lines of Scripture descriptive of them. One body of Scripture directly applies to and governs the "wheat" or heavenly people, and one applies to the "tares," the "children of the evil one." The marvelous revelation of the believer's relation to Christ and the heavenlies, and his deliverance from any actual identification with this age, though in it, will be the subject of another chapter. Only the relation of the unregenerate to this world and to Satan will be continued here.

As it has pleased Satan to hide himself and all his projects from the unbelieving world, that which God has revealed in all faithfulness will be received only by those who have unquestioning confidence in His Word.

According to Scripture, the relation of the unbelieving to Satan is far more vital than a mere pleasure-seeking allegiance. On two occasions Jesus spoke of the unsaved as the "children of Satan" (Matt. 13:38; Jno. 8:44), and Paul so addressed Elymas, the sorcerer, according to Acts 13:10. The same class is also twice called the "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2; Col. 3:6), and once it is called the "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).

It is evident that these are descriptions of the same class of people, since both terms are employed together in Eph. 5:6: "Let no man deceive you: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." The exact cause of that wrath is stated in Rom. 1:18 (R.V.): "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness;" the word "hinder" being the same as is used in II Thes. 2:7, where the Holy Spirit is said to be restraining the working of lawlessness in this age. Therefore, the willing neglect and disregard for the testimony of God by the world, has allied them with Satan, and placed them under the wrath of God, which must find its righteous execution in due time if grace is not accepted.

Again, Satan is revealed as directing and empowering the children of disobedience: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this age, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1, 2). The real force of this passage, also, is dependent upon the meaning of one word; the word "worketh" being the same as is used in Phil. 2:13, where God is said to impart His wisdom and strength to the believer: "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Additional light may be had as to the reality of this relationship from the following passages in which the same original word is used: "And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all" (I Cor. 12:6); "But all these (gifts) worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (I Cor. 12:11); "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:19-20); "For He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:8); "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1:29); "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to his power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). It is also said in regard to the energizing power of Satan, using the same original word: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (II Thes. 2:7); "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5). In the last two passages quoted, the meaning is, like the preceding passages, of an imparted energy, and is, therefore, most suggestive.

It may then be concluded from the testimony of Scripture that Satan imparts his wisdom and strength to the unbelieving in the same manner as the power of God is imparted to the believer by the Holy Spirit. There is, however, no revelation as to the comparative degree of strength imparted by each. It should be further noted in this connection that this impartation of energizing power from Satan is not toward a limited few who might be said, because of some strange conduct, to be possessed of a demon; but is the common condition of all who are yet unsaved, and are, therefore, still in the "power of darkness."

The relation between the unregenerate and Satan is still more vital, according to the original from which I Jno. 5:19 is translated. The Revised Version renders it, with marginal note, as follows: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." In this passage there are two startling revelations in regard to this relationship. First: the word "in" is the same as is used everywhere of the believer when he is

said to be in Christ, and in the case of the believer it signifies an organic union to Christ--as a branch is in the vine, so the believer is in Christ. Though the word, when used of the unregenerate, probably cannot mean the same degree of organic life-relationship as exists between Christ and the believer, yet it does denote a deep relationship; and Satan is the light, inspiration, and power, of all those whom he energizes.

The second revelation in the passage is found in the word "lieth"--"The whole world lieth in the evil one." It might as well be translated "lieth asleep;" for its condition is not only a fixed position in the evil one, but is also a condition of unconsciousness. The saved ones are said to be in the Father's hand where no created thing can pluck them out (Jno. 10:29), and underneath are the everlasting arms: so the great mass of unsaved humanity is in the arms of Satan; and by his subtlety they are all unconscious of their position and relation. This is not at all strange. Even the believer has no present power to discern his glorious position and security in the Father's hand, apart from the assurance of the written Word. Much less, then, can the unbeliever come to realize his own position in the arms of Satan, when, under the direction of Satan, he gives no heed to the testimony of God.

Still another passage should be noted in this connection. In II Cor. 4:3, 4, Satan is described as the god of this world, blinding the minds of the unbelieving. The whole passage is as follows: "And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this age hath blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God should not dawn upon them" (R.V. with margin). In this passage the unconscious condition is said to be the direct result of the power of Satan, and the blindness of their thoughts, it is stated, is along one particular line. To them the gospel is veiled; and the gospel here referred to is not the whole life story of Jesus, nor is it the "Gospel of the Kingdom;" but the message of good news or favor; the exact terms of Salvation by grace alone. This Paul here calls "our gospel," for to him it was first unfolded in its completeness.

The unregenerate are, then, unconscious of their position in the arms of Satan, and blind in their thoughts toward the gospel of mercy and favor,--their only hope for time or eternity. Satan, like a fond mother, is bending over those in his arms, breathing into their minds the quieting balm of a "universal fatherhood of God" and a "universal brotherhood of man;" suggesting their worthiness before God on the ground of their own moral character and physical generation; feeding their tendency to imitate the true faith by great humanitarian undertakings and schemes for the reformation of individuals and the betterment of the social order. God's necessary requirements of regeneration are carefully set aside, and the blinded souls go on without hope, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in there, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 5:18). How important, as a preparation for salvation, is the illuminating work of the Spirit in conviction, by which He lifts the veil and opens the mind to a new vision of the redemption and glory that is in Christ! Without this God-given vision there can be no understanding of the way of life, nor any intelligent decision for Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/lewis-sperry-chafer/the-course-of-this-age/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net