

Loving His Appearing! (2 Timothy 4:8)

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Loving His Appearing!



In his book "Men at Work," columnist George Will mentions the firm justice meted out by baseball umpires. He writes, "Toughness is not enough, but it is necessary." Once when Pinelli called Babe Ruth out on strikes, Ruth gave the umpire this argument. He reasoned: "There's 40,000 people here who know that last one was a ball, tomato head." Pinelli

replied with the measured stateliness: "Maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts." Folks, God's verdict is the one that counts! And in the end when we stand before Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, all that matters is His verdict – what He says regarding our life and service to Him.

The apostle Paul knew that at the end of our days only one opinion will matter, which is the call of the ultimate Umpire, the "righteous Judge," whom before we live out the game of life.

2 Timothy 4:8

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day (the Rapture and Bema Seat of Christ): and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

In our study, we will discover the importance of longing to meet our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ someday. When Jesus returns for the Church (the Rapture of God's New Testament Church), we should be in right relationship with Him, fellowshiping with Him, living in obedience to Him, practicing discipleship, serving Him, so we might in the coming day love His appearing and not be ashamed at Christ's return! The "crown of righteousness" is a reward for living a righteous life – a life of integrity and commitment to God. The Bible teaches that

“the Lord, the righteous judged” is the One who will sort it all out at His return - the good, the bad, and the ugly, twenty years of faithful service versus three years of unfaithful living and service. Apparently the crown of righteousness is given to those who love Christ’s appearing because they HAVE lived and WERE living a life of consecration and integrity before Jesus Christ up to His return.

We develop from this verse our theme: Loving His Appearing! Our key thought from this verse is very clear: “them that love his appearing.” This would refer to those believers who are living for Christ, in fellowship with Him, and who are in tune with His will and way for their personal lives. In the immediate context, Paul's commitment to the Lord is a clear indication of his love for Christ's appearing (2 Tim. 4:7) and this commitment is in striking contrast to Demas (2 Tim. 4:10) who loved this present world and who in that condition would not love Christ’s appearing.



The Lord’s appearing, His return in the Rapture, is a warning, an encouragement, and an incentive to us. We should love His appearing and look forward to it with earnest expectation and joy (2 Timothy 4:8).

Why will some believers love Christ’s return? It’s because they are living a righteous life and have committed themselves to their Master (Jesus Christ). They are in love with Him and dedicated to His cause. Therefore, they will not be floundering around with sin and living independent of His will when Jesus returns for His Church. Instead, they will be living for Him and as a result love

His appearing. The apostle uses what is called a perfect tense in the Greek language (“have loved”) indicating the accomplishment of something in their past lives (loving Christ’s return) which has a continuing effect and impact upon their present-day lives, and is occurring when Jesus returns in the Rapture. Dean Alford’s Greek New Testament explains the word like this: “but also to all who shall then be found to have loved and still to be loving His appearing (ver. 1).”

In other words, here is the description of a believer who has been looking forward to Christ’s return with great joy and expectancy (“looking for that blessed hope” – Titus 2:13) because his life is in spiritual order and he is ready to see and meet

Jesus. His life has been characterized as loving His return since he is ready to meet the One he has lived for, longer for, and loved throughout his life.

This is talking about a love that has not dissipated because of sin, disobedience, and backsliding. It's a fervent and non-fluctuation love that results in obedience and consecration to Jesus. Revelation 2:4 states, "I have somewhat against thee, for thou has left thy first love." So to speak, their honeymoon was over! If we are in love with Jesus today, then we will love His appearing. As God's children, we need to be LOOKING for the Lord's return, LONGING to meet Him, and LIVING for Him, if we are going to LOVE His appearing. Yes, many believers will love and enjoy Christ's return. Their hearts have been in tune with Christ's imminent return. They are ready to meet the Savior, the One they have served and loved for so many years. If we are in love with Jesus today, then we will love His appearing!

We should not misunderstand what Paul is teaching here. I know that all Christians will experience joy and delight at the Rapture. After all, seeing Jesus for the very first time will bring great joy to our hearts. Seeing our saved loved ones (1 Thess. 4:17-18) will also trigger joy in our hearts. Receiving reward for the way we have lived and served Christ will also bring great delight and joy to our souls. Getting a new glorified body will certainly bring great blessing to our hearts. But all of these wonderful blessings that we will experience at the time of the Rapture does not override the truth that some Christians may not love His appearing when it initially occurs since they were found in a worldly state of living.

Some Christians will be ashamed at Christ's coming (1 John 2:28). This is because they were not found waiting for Him with expectancy, living for Him, and fellowshiping with Christ. They will know that their life was not in spiritual order when He returned for them and that they had not faithfully lived for Christ and served Him throughout their Christian life on earth. So, there will be some regrets for not living for Christ when Jesus returns in His appearing for His saints. For this reason, not all Christians will love His initial appearing as others.

Although all Christians will in one sense love His appearing (seeing Jesus, seeing our loves ones in Christ, receiving reward that we did gain) there is another sense, based upon what Paul is teaching, that not every Christian will love Christ's appearing in the same manner. Again, this is because their lives will be out of spiritual order when Jesus returns, or they will realize they have squandered away much of their days on earth without really living for the Lord faithfully and serving

Him. Paul is talking about the initial appearance of Christ and our accountability before Him. It is in this sense that not every Christian will love His appearing.

Think of it this way. We know that all God's children love Him in varying degrees and ways, and at various times in their lives, and that God is working together His providential purpose for them, which is Christlikeness based upon His eternal plan and purpose (Rom. 8:28-30). There is also no doubt that all Christians will express some transformation of living (1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10) that will result in varying amounts of reward (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10). Our God is a very generous God! However, Paul is teaching here in the context of living and service (2 Tim. 4:7), that not all Christians will love His appearing, or initially enjoy the return of Christ for His saints. The reason is because they were not fighting and living in victory at the actual time of His return. They had not finished the race and were not found being faithful to the Scriptures by defending them and standing up for the truth (2 Cor. 4:7). They were found with sin in their hearts and lives at His appearing. They were found in open disobedience and defiance against Christ at His appearing. This will be cause for not enjoying Christ's return at the Rapture.

Although there will many joys and blessings associated with the Judgment Seat of Christ based upon our grace relationship with Jesus Christ, and since Christ will reward all Christians ("then shall every man have praise of God" - 1 Cor. 4:5), this does not rule out the Bema (Judgment Seat of Christ) as also being a time of inspection and retrospection of our lives which can produce regrets and the initial response of not loving Christ's appearing but being ashamed at His appearing. Especially when we are not found living for Jesus Christ when He returns, not loving Him as we should, when we are overcome with worldly living and carnality.

There will be some tears and time of reflection over our lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ and I truly believe that we will know in a moment's time our gains and losses in the area of reward. I am not one to each that it will take seven years for Jesus to figure it all out (our reward). The Bible says, we will "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17) and this will evidently be the meeting place where we are examined before we enter Heaven. And it will only take one look of our blessed Lord, whose eyes are as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14; 2:18), omniscient and all-knowing, which will result in us knowing where we stand in relation to our eternal reward. There will be no giant screens of our sins and failures being revealed to everyone in Heaven. Men and books say certain things about this judgment that

the Bible does not say. This will be a PERSONAL and PRIVATE encounter that each one of us will have with the Lord for Paul states that Christ has “laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” This will be a personal encounter between each Christian and His Lord “so every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). This is personal. 2 Corinthians 5:10 concludes that the church will corporately stand before this judgment seat, but the examination will be private and personal (“that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad”). This too is personal and private in nature.

We must understand that the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) is not a place of CONDEMNATION for our sins (this would be contrary to our grace relationship with Christ). It is a place of COMMENDATION of service and reward. However, to get to the commendation and our reward there must be a general inspection and sweep of our life and service. We don’t earn our salvation, but we do earn our reward. Concerning the awesome nature and our accountability before the Lord on this future day, Frank Logsdon said: “I’ll be glad when it’s all over.”

In the immediate context, Paul's commitment to the Lord is a clear indication of his love for Christ's appearing (2 Tim. 4:7) and this commitment is in striking contrast to Demas who loved this present world (2 Tim. 4:10) and who in that condition would not love Christ's appearing. Again, there will plenty of enjoyment to go around for every Christian when Jesus returns for His Church Age saints, but some Christians will initially be ashamed, not prepared for His return, and therefore not enjoy or love His appearing. This is because they were found possessing a cold heart, a carnal life, and were caught off guard spiritually.

William Pettingill shared this story. Dr. George E. Guille once asked Pastor William Anderson, Jr., of Dallas, Texas, what his attitude was on the Lord's Second Coming. He answered that he didn't know that he had any attitude on the subject. He wasn't interested. He had been so busy preaching the first coming that he had not had time to think about the Second Coming. “Well,” said Mr. Guille, “I only wanted to know whether you will love His appearing” as the Bible says in 2 Timothy 4:8.

Left alone in his study, “Dr. Bill,” as his many friends called him, sat at his desk asking himself over and over, “Do I love His appearing.” Later, the church was as much amazed, as Mrs. Anderson had been, when the pastor explained what had

changed his convictions, that he had become a premillennialist who could now look forward to the imminent return of Christ with great anticipation and possess a deep longing and love His appearing. You see, Pastor Anderson had come to the church as a postmillennialist, which does not live with the blessed hope of Christ's imminent return in his heart. Well, as a result of this change of conviction, the pastor thought the only fair thing to do was to resign. After all, he had changed his doctrine.

But one of the elders spoke up and cried out, "Why, my dear pastor, this is what we have been praying for all along. Resign nothing! God has answered our prayers!" So, together, the entire congregation began to look forward with great anticipation to Christ's appearing. A special longing was built around the much-anticipated return of Jesus Christ. And from that time forward Dr. Bill Anderson's ministry was transformed. In fact, his pastorate became so fruitful that it was spoken of throughout the whole world. All because of this one verse about loving Christ's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

In one sense, we too should be living on the edge of our seat, possessing great anticipation for the return of Christ. It should be a blessed hope in our hearts (Titus 2:13). We should be listening for the trumpet sound (1 Thess. 4:16) and looking forward to Christ's glorious return for His Church. Perhaps Today! Yes, if we are really anticipating Christ's return, this will keep our hearts and lives close to God, which will result in us loving His appearing when Jesus comes back. If we are really longing for Christ's coming, we will keep our lives in spiritual order, be looking for our Savior (Phil. 3:20) and be ready to meet Him when He returns. Yes, we will love His appearing!

Here is our main emphasis in this study. We will love Christ's return if we are living righteously.

There are two possibilities.

I. Some believers will love Christ's return.

How can we be sure that we love Christ's appearing?

A. We must be prepared for His return.

2 Timothy 4:7

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

This verse reveals or expresses our own love and dedication to Jesus Christ which will result in the gaining of reward and loving His appearing (verse 8). Loving Jesus prior to His return (in service and faithfulness) is the guarantee that we will love His appearing! This is talking about spiritual preparation. Paul is talking about faithfulness to His spiritual duties in this context. Living for Jesus! Sticking to the stuff!



Paul sums up his life and ministry by using three images that are athletic. He was like a determined wrestler or boxer, he had fought a good fight; he was like a runner who had finished his course or lifelong race victoriously. He was running to win and did win! The third image is that of a steward who had faithfully guarded his Master’s deposit: “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Paul used this image often in his pastoral letters.

We must understand verse 8 (“loving his appearing”) in the light of verse 7 (living the Christian life). This verse informs us how we can be ready for Christ’s return and love His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7 is the description of a man of God who was committed to Christ and deeply in love with Him and His cause. And this is the type of Christian who will love Christ’s appearing!

Our preparation for Christ’s return involves three matters.

1. Fighting – “I have fought a good fight” (the image of a boxer)

Fighting is linked to loving His appearing. What are we fighting against? We are in a battle against the world, the flesh, the devil. Our battle is really a spiritual battle – not a physical one! If we are going to be spiritually in tune with Christ and living for Him at His return, then we must be winning the battle over the world (system against God), the flesh (lustful cravings) and devil (our archenemy).

Ephesians 6:12 says:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.”



What are we fighting for? The truth which is the unalterable and unchanging standard of God’s Word. Keeping the truth and standing up for what is right is what we are battling for today. We cannot follow the winds of false teaching which opposes God’s infallible Word and impeccable holiness.

1 Timothy 6:12 declares:

“Fight the good fight of (the) faith (*fighting for the truth, sticking to the truth, not backing down, doing what is right in light of God’s Word*), lay hold on eternal life (*remember to meditate on eternity – don’t lose sight of our reward and recognition*), whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

Listen, we are in a fight! We are in a battle. Unless we keep a spiritual edge we will lose the battle. As a result, we will not be looking for His coming and therefore will not love His appearing when He does return for us. This means that our attention will be given over to the physical instead of the spiritual and when Jesus returns we will be floundering around with sin, following the flesh, and be filled with worldly philosophies instead of the Spirit. There is an intense battle we are engaged in today. And if you don’t know you are in a battle, then you are losing the battle and don’t even realize it. I have fought a good fight!

“The fight is on, the trumpet sound is ringing out,
The cry “To arms!” is heard afar and near;
The Lord of hosts is marching on to victory,
The triumph of the Christ will soon appear.
The fight is on, O Christian soldier,
And face to face in stern array,
With armor gleaming, and colors streaming,
The right and wrong engage today!

The fight is on, but be not weary;
Be strong, and in His might hold fast;
If God be for us, His banner o'er us,
We'll sing the victor's song at last!"

If we don't keep in the fight, we won't love His appearing!

2. Finishing - "finished my course" (the image of runner)

Finishing is also linked to loving His appearing. The Christian life is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash. Finishing a marathon is not easy, so when you see a man sprint across the finish line, you ought to try to find out his secret. The apostle Paul was such a man. It's as if he has crossed the finish line with energy to spare!



Acts 20:24

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul was always concerned about finishing well. He did not want to blow his testimony before he died or before Jesus returns. He wanted to win the victory over the flesh and finish the race or course (journey) that God had planned for his life. He wanted to finish the race victoriously and fulfil God's intended goal for his life.

Hebrews 12:1

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill;
O may it all my powers engage,
To do my Master's will!"

I saw a T-shirt that said: "We did not come here to just race. We came here to win!" There is a race to win! Are you aware of this? Do you even realize that you are in a race against worldliness, fleshly sins, false teachings, secular and pagan philosophies, ungodliness, and the devil himself? The Christian life is repeatedly pictured or portrayed as a race that needs to be run and finished. This is a familiar image that Paul gives elsewhere.

1 Corinthians 9:24 also speaks of the imagery of a race and runner:

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain."

Paul was not teaching mutilation of the body but illustrating the importance of spiritual discipline (devotions, dedication to God's House, decisions in the will of God). Are you running to win? Is your desire to win the race? Do you want to win the race against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Do you want to win the war over your sinful disposition, selfish living, and secular living? Beloved, we need to press on!

My wife and I were exercising at the track and there was a younger bearded man running around the track like a deer or gazelle. I mean he was flying! We began jogging around the track just when he was leaving. As we passed by him I said, "Are you leaving already, I was just going to challenge you to a race." He looked at me, smiled, and said "Next time." Well, about a week later we were at the track and all of a sudden this fellow came running by us and said, "I'm ready for that race now!" I won't tell you how it ended because I don't want to brag!

Yes, we are in a race! We are not competing against one another but against sin, selfish living, secular and worldly philosophies and Satan himself. Do you have spiritual stamina for the race that is ahead? Are you running to win the race? How committed are you to finishing the race? We should stay committed to finishing the race for if we don't, we won't love Christ's appearing and we will lose our crown of righteousness that He wants to give us at His return.

A man was trying hypnosis to help him quit smoking. His friend asked whether he thought it would work. “Sure,” he said, “it worked the last time I tried it!” Let’s face it: starting well is relatively easy. Finishing well is a different matter! Starting that new diet or exercise program is kind of fun but hanging in over the long haul is the real test. Getting married is exciting and relatively easy. Staying close through the struggles, adjustments, and trials is not always an easy matter.

The same is true of the Christian life. Becoming a Christian is relatively easy. You acknowledge to God that you are a sinner and receive by faith the free gift of eternal life that Christ provided by His shed blood. You cannot work for salvation nor do anything to qualify for it. God gives it freely to all that recognize their need and trust in Christ alone. But then comes the hard part—hanging in there as a Christian in a world that is hostile towards God and His people. The world constantly dangles in front of you all that it has to offer in opposition to the things of God. From within, the flesh entices you to forsake Christ and gratify your sinful desires. The enemy hits you with temptation after temptation. The real test of your faith is, will you endure to the end of your life and keep seeking to please God with your life and live a righteous life. Will you finish well and be found honoring God with your life when Jesus returns.

Dr. Lehman Strauss held meetings at my church years ago. He was a well-known teacher that had a very fruitful ministry. I remember when he looked at me in the eyes and said, “My desire is that I will finish well.” This should be our supreme goal and desire as well. We should keep running, press on, stay on the racecourse, and finish well. If we don’t keep running the Christian race and finish well, we won’t love His appearing!

3. Faithfulness “I have kept the faith” (a steward)



The expression “the faith” does not refer to the Christian’s subjective faith in the Lord but the body of truth that all Christians should believe and guard (the Scriptures – the Bible). In general, we are to be a steward of the Bible, upholding sound doctrine, defending the truth, standing up for what is right.

1 Timothy 6:20

“O Timothy, keep (*guard*) that which is committed to thy trust, (*the true doctrines of the Christian faith*) avoiding profane and vain babblings (*empty chatter or talk about matters which are worthless – psychobabble, teaching of the cults, legalism – salvation by works*), and oppositions of science (*man’s debunked knowledge*) falsely so called” (*like evolutionary myth, humanistic ideas and philosophies*).

We have a stewardship ministry to protect and guard the deposit of truth that God has given to us. We are to be faithful to the Scriptures – preaching (declaring) them truthfully, guarding them tenaciously, and standing for them unapologetically.

Jude 1:3

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend (*a contest that involves struggle and agonizing*) for the faith (*what we believe as Christians*) which was once delivered unto the saints” (*the body of truth – given by the apostles and officially recognized as Scripture by the early Church*).

We have many manmade theories today that are causing Christians to no longer defend the faith in various areas. We need to be a faithful steward of the faith (the truth) that God has given to us. I’m amazed how many Christians imbibe what is called progressive creationism (God slowly creates things through evolution over billions of years). This is an oxymoron statement – creation and evolution mean the same thing? Some Christians are doubting the literalness of the first six chapters in Genesis. I’m really taken back at what they are teaching in the Christian colleges and seminaries today.

I don’t get truth from pseudo-science; I get it from the absolute standard of the Bible. I believe what the Bible says and I do not explain it way. God created the universe in six, literal, solar days. This is what God’s Word teaches. A Christian who embraces this pseudo-science will likely be ashamed at His Coming and not

love His coming. Can you imagine seeing Jesus for the first time, the direct Creator of everything, and realize that you were peddling a false evolutionary myth alongside of God's creation? I doubt that you could love His appearing when you see the great God and Creator! Why? It's because you have not kept the faith! You abandoned the doctrine of creation.

There are many Christians today who have also misunderstood about the doctrine of grace. They claim that grace saves but at the same time grace cannot keep them saved without their own good works. Imagine seeing Jesus for the very first time, the One who died for you and shed His blood for you, and when you see Him (the Lamb of God) in all of His resplendent glory and grace, you will realize that you have doubted that His sacrifice could save you forever. Imagine looking at Jesus and thinking, "I should have never doubted what You did for me." You see, believing and keeping the faith (the body of truth) is important so we can love His appearing.

When it comes to keeping the faith and loving His appearing, it means we must embrace the truth of Scripture. When it comes to keeping the faith and loving His appearing, it means that we must maintain our faithfulness to the Great Doctrines of Scripture. It means that we will defend doctrinal truth tenaciously and not back down! If we cave and compromise to false teaching, sweep it under the carpet, ignore it, and do not defend the truth, we will not be keepers of the faith. As a result, we will lose the crown and joy that we can experience at Christ's return.

Today we have the proliferation of cults which deny Christ's deity and teach annihilationism. We have Roman Catholicism which says a person is justified by their good works and which adopts the doctrine of Mariolatry. This is errant and erroneous teaching. We must stand up for the truth and not be silent in the midst of these great heresies! We must remain FAITHFUL to the truth. We are to be stewards of the faith (truth) so that when Jesus returns, we will love His appearing. You see, keeping the faith (standing up for the truth) is necessary if we are going to love Christ's appearing.

We are also called upon to defend "the doctrine which is according to godliness" – the type of teaching that promotes godly behavior (1 Timothy 6:3). This refers to teaching godliness and righteousness, godliness instead of greed, or Christlike living instead of carnality. If we are following the false teaching of greed (like the

Wealth and Health Movement) we might be surprised at the Rapture. We may not love His appearing because we have not kept the faith of sanctified/godly living.

The Bible is the final authority. We stand upon it without apology! We must stand up for the truth and counter false teaching if we want to love His appearing! The Bible condemns the Islamic religion and the paganistic ideas and philosophies that are parading our land today; it condemns the secular philosophies of relativism, heathenism, hedonism, existentialism, and evolutionism. It teaches sound doctrine regarding the origins of life (what happened in the past) and the End Times (what will happen in the future – the Rapture). The Scriptures must be our final authority. They should be our guide and lifeline and we must be a faithful steward of the Scriptures by **STANDING** up for the Bible and not **STRAYING** from what it clearly reveals and teaches.

God has summoned us to be stewards of the Scriptures! We are to keep the faith! We are to stand upon the truth, declare the truth, and live by it at all costs. Why? It's because Jesus is coming again. We cannot love His appearing when we have been imbibing false doctrine, participating in inappropriate behavior, and are involved with worldly vices and carnality. If we want to love Christ's appearing, we must never stop fighting! We must never stop running! We must never stop believing! We must always believe in the truth.

David M. Panton was a very able successor to Robert Govett's pulpit at Surrey Chapel, Norwich, England. Panton was the founder and editor of *Dawn* magazine, a strong voice for deep scriptural and prophetic truth from 1924 until his death in 1955. Panton was well-known for his speaking and writing abilities concerning scriptural prophetic subjects. He was known as "The Prince of Prophecy."

D.M. Panton once said:

"To identify oneself with the truth is to place one's self in the heart of a storm from which there is no escape for your life."

Paul was not always popular but he remained faithful. This is what really counts. This is what God is looking for today in our lives. God has not called us to be famous but to be faithful – a faithful steward of the Scriptures – upholding them doctrinally and practically in relation to our daily living.

In 1904, William Borden, a member of the Borden dairy family, finished high school in Chicago and was given a world cruise as a graduation present. Particularly while traveling through the Near East and Far East, he became heavily burdened for the lost. After returning home, he spent seven years at Princeton University, the first four in undergraduate work and the last three in seminary. While in school, he penned these words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves." Although his family pleaded with him to take control of the business, which was foundering, he insisted that God's call to the mission field had priority. After disposing of his wealth, he added "No retreat" after "No reserves."

On his way to China to witness to Muslims there, he contracted cerebral meningitis in Egypt and died within a month. After his death, someone looking through his Bible discovered these final words: "No regrets." He knew that the Lord does not require success, only faithfulness. In fact, good work that is sincerely intended but not completed, through no fault of the doer, will merit a sincere doer's reward. This is because it is the heart that God weighs in the final analysis. William Borden accomplished virtually none of the ministry he had envisioned, having been cut off by death even before he reached his field of service. But his final declaration of "No regrets" was well founded in the assurance that he had genuinely sought and faithfully obeyed the Lord's will.

This is what Paul has been talking about here - no reserves, no retreats and no regrets! "I have fought, I have finished, and I've been faithful. I have kept the faith" Whether we realize it or not, we are involved in a war between right and wrong, truth and error, sin and righteousness, God and Satan, and Heaven and hell. And God has called us to be stewards of the truth, the Gospel, and of sanctified or holy living. If we do not remain a good steward of Scripture and if we don't maintain a godly or righteous lifestyle, we won't love His appearing! This means that only those believers who are living a righteous life and who have stayed the course and finished well (2 Tim. 4:8) will at the moment of Christ's return, when the trumpet sounds, love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Pastor Ray Pritchard shares these encouraging words:

"So the word of Lord is this: Keep on fighting. Keep on running. Keep on believing. And the best of all is yet to come. It won't be long now, just a little while and the Lord himself will return, and all our struggles will be over.

This hot battle won't last forever, this long road will soon come to an end, and this old world full of "dangers, toils and snares" won't last much longer. Hold on to your faith, child of God. Keep believing. Stay strong. Put on the whole armor of God. Hold on to your faith and never give up. There's a finish line out there somewhere, and it's closer than any of us realize.

Finish Strong!
Finish Strong!
Finish Strong!"

B. We must be rewarded for our righteousness

How else can we be sure that we will love Christ's appearing? Paul goes on to say that right living (righteous living) will also result in loving Christ's appearing. We will love Christ's return if we are living righteously when He returns. If you are caught living an unholy life, disobeying God, harboring known sin or bitterness in your heart and life, unforgiveness, then you will not love Christ's appearing in the way that Paul speaks about here.

Of course, all Christians will receive reward at Christ's coming (2 Cor. 5:10). But this is a reward that is associated with what Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:7 (fighting, finishing, and faithfulness). This is a specific and special reward given to those who are living a righteous life when the Rapture happens. It's a reward that will be given to Christians who love His appearing because their lives were in order when Jesus returns. When Jesus comes back in the Rapture, if we are found to be fighting as God's soldier, faithful as God's servant, and are finishing the race effectively, then we will receive this crown and love His appearing. It's a reward that focuses on being right before God (living a righteous life) when Jesus returns for we have stayed the course.

2 Timothy 4:8

"Henceforth (because of his fighting, finishing and faithfulness) there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

The righteous living of verse 7 and the reward (crown) of verse 8 will result in loving Christ's appearing! Both go together and inform us on how we can love and

enjoy Christ's appearing in the Rapture. A crown of righteousness is talking about a reward that we will receive for living a righteous life when Jesus comes back for us. The expression "that day" refers to Christ's coming for His saints and the Judgment Seat that follows on the heels of His return. The expression "that day" is linked to the time of the believer's examination, when Christ will righteously judge each one of us as his servants. Martin Luther said that He had two days marked on his calendar: "Today and That day!" This simplifies living! A day of reckoning and reward is coming when Jesus returns for His children.

The reward that is pictured here is a victor's crown (Greek is *stephanos*). This specific reward will be given to all Christians who concentrated on living a righteous life, and whose lives are in spiritual order, when Jesus returns. It is certain that Paul was thinking of the Judgment seat of Christ. He referred to his Judge (Jesus Christ) in verses 1 and 8.

J. Oswald Sanders writes:

"This crown is awarded to those who have completed the Christian race with integrity, with eyes fixed on the coming Lord. It is the reward for fulfilling the ministry entrusted to one."

If we have welcomed Christ into our life, if we are longing for His appearing and are faithfully running the race, then the same prize awaits us. We can count on it, plan on it, anticipate it! It's a promise from God. Think about this. We cannot receive this crown if we are not taught about the Rapture, longing for it, and have not kept our lives in order for this coming day. How tragic that many Christians are not taught about the Rapture and therefore they are in one sense cheated out of gaining this crown! No preacher should say the preaching of the Rapture and all that surrounds it is unimportant!

I don't have an exact answer on how the Lord (the righteous Judge) will determine the righteous character of one of His children over another. This is because there are spiritually positive and negative aspects in all of our lives. But it should be our aim and desire to *knowingly* (with the knowledge we have about the truth) keep our lives in spiritual order in view of His return. We should always seek to remain faithful to His cause and not compromise the truth in any way.

So, what qualifies as righteous living, which will result in receiving the crown of righteousness at the return of Christ? It involves a high priority given to righteousness and commitment to spiritual living within our Christian that will result in certain believers receiving the crown of righteousness. If we are knowingly harboring sin in our hearts and disobedience in our lives, rebelling against God in some specific areas, holding grudges against others (James 5:9), engaged in unwholesome relationships, living in sin, and have unconfessed sin in our hearts, then this crown will be withheld from us. But if we are honestly striving to please God in view of the Rapture, if our deep desire is to live above reproach, obey the truth, if our overall character is that of purity and righteousness, then we will love His appearing and receive this crown.

There seems to be a special reward for those Christians who possess a special love for the Rapture and who are living a righteous life in view of Christ's imminent return (1 John 3:2). As a result of their love for the Rapture and righteousness, they will also love Christ's appearing. This is the same group of Christians who will not be ashamed at his coming (1 John 2:28). This opens up the real possibility that carnal, compromising, and corrupt Christians who are not running, winning, and finishing the race (2 Tim. 4:7) will be surprised when Jesus returns and in some measure experience shame at the Rapture. If we keep looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:20) we will love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). We will keep our lives in spiritual order, be ready for Christ's return, and be rewarded with the crown of righteousness.

Again, it's true that all Christians will experience great joy at the Rapture which associated with our reunion with loved ones (1 Thess. 4:17-18), the various rewards that we do receive (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10), and our new relationship with Christ (1 John 3:2). But at the same time there can be a real sense of initial loss at His appearing. If we have been loving the world – we will not love His appearing! If we have been loving our sins more than our Savior, then we will not love His appearing. We should always maintain our spiritual life, keep short accounts with God, keep the faith (guard and uphold the truth), maintain faithfulness to the Lord, and be looking for the Rapture with joy and expectancy. If we are not looking for the Savior, longing for His return, and living for Jesus Christ, then we will lose the crown of righteousness and not love Christ's appearing. My real desire and longing is that I would be doing what is pleasing to the Lord when He returns and love His appearing!

So, we have seen that it will be the “righteous Judge” who will give to His people the crown of righteousness in the coming day. Jesus will sort it all out when He returns – the corruption, carnality, and compromise found in the Church (the lives of His people). This will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ which is the specific day and time of our reward (2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul was absolutely certain that a day of reckoning and reward was coming. As a result of fighting, running the race, remaining faithful and finishing well, he would be given a prize. Again, the “crown of righteousness” is a reward for living a righteous life at the time of the Rapture. It will be given to us if we have been dedicated to maintaining the truth and living a holy and righteous life when Jesus returns for His Church.

“To live is Christ, and death is gain,
If for the Lord we spend each day!
Redeem the time — 'tis God's own gift,
Let us not squander it away!”

In the mid-1970s, Ed Roberts created the world's first commercially successful personal computer (PC). He hired a 19-year-old named Bill Gates to write software for him. Roberts sold his computer business in 1977 and bought a farm. Seven years later, at the age of 41, he entered medical school. Today Bill Gates is the head of the largest software company in the world. Ed Roberts is a physician in a small Georgia town. Roberts says, "The implication is that the PC is the most important thing I've ever done, and I don't think that's true. Every day I deal with things that are equally if not more important here with my patients."

How can we evaluate the significance of our lives? Something deep inside tells us that it cannot be measured by wealth and fame. What is significant is that we run the race and finish well! In 2 Timothy 4:7, we have seen that Paul said that he had fought a good fight, finished the course God had for his life, and faithfully kept the truth of God’s Word (did not compromise). He knew that it would pay off someday. This is a crown that focuses on fighting right, living right, and finishing right! This crown will be given as a reward *for* righteous living for all those who love His appearing.

Since he had accomplished these things he now says that he will one day receive a “crown of righteousness” (vs. 8) at Christ’s coming, along with all those who love the appearing of Christ, in view of their service, loyalty, and commitment to Christ

and His cause. This means that if a Christian really longs for the coming of Christ and lives in the light of this glorious event, then his life will be righteous, and he will be rewarded accordingly. Here is a fresh reminder that the Rapture, when truly believed and loved, results in a purifying and sanctifying influence on our life.

1 John 3:2-3

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

This is what Paul is teaching in 2 Timothy 4:8. He lived in such a way (a sanctified and faithful life) that he might receive the crown of righteousness at the Rapture. The return of Christ had a purifying effect on Paul’s life and the same should be true for us today.

Philippians 1:10 gives similar advice:

“That ye may approve things that are excellent (discern the superior things that are related to Christian living); that ye may be sincere (pure and genuine) and without offence (blameless and approved of God) till the day of Christ.”

Paul wanted the saints to be in a right personal relationship with God through fellowship with Him and living above reproach when the day of Christ (the Rapture) occurs. This means that we should be living out lives of purity and integrity, so we are ready for the Judgment Seat of Christ when Jesus, the righteous Judge, returns (2 Tim. 4:8).

Here is a final thought for our first point. Paul instructed Timothy to “make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). This means we should fulfill whatever God wants us to do. Timothy’s ministry would not be exactly like Paul’s (there are no cookie cutter ministries and churches), but it would be important to the cause of Christ. The same is true for all of us. We must remember that no God-directed ministry is unimportant in God’s eyes.

A young preacher once complained to Charles Spurgeon, the famous British preacher of the 1800s, that he did not have as big a church as he deserved. “How many do you preach to?” Spurgeon asked. “Oh, about 100,” the man replied.

Solemnly Spurgeon said, "That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment." We do not measure the success of a ministry only on the basis of statistics or on what people see. We must realize that our faithfulness is important and that God sees the heart.

One thing is certain, we will love Christ's appearing when we are living in light of eternal reward and are actually rewarded for our faithfulness and dedication to godly living and service. This reward awaits all those believers who run the Christian race successfully to the finish line and therefore long for "his appearing." Again, we are to run to win!

Revelation 22:12

"And, behold, I come quickly (suddenly, without delay); and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Friend, will you be spiritually ready for the return of Jesus? Are you prepared for the trumpet sound? Is your life in order? Are you standing up for the truth and what is right? Are you living in such a manner that you might gain the crown of righteousness when Jesus returns? Will you love His appearing? These preparatory steps (Fighting, Finishing, and Faithfulness) factor into how much we will love His appearing.

"See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;
Mighty ones around us falling, courage almost gone!
See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow!
In our Leader's Name we triumph over every foe.
Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near;
Onward comes our great Commander, cheer, my comrades, cheer!
Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."

The question hangs in the air: "How do you want to be remembered?" What do you hope people will say about you after you are gone? How will the people who knew you best summarize 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80 years of living? A man shared this true story. A while back my brother Andy, who lives in Florence, Alabama, told me that he wanted to show me a graveyard in the country. The next time I was in Florence, he drove along a remote country road and finally stopped near the ruins

of an antebellum plantation. We got out and walked into the forest about a quarter of a mile. There we found the family cemetery for the owners of the 19th-century plantation. We climbed over a low wall and began inspecting the gravestones, most of them 150 years old. Most of the markers contained phrases like, "Loving father," "Beloved mother," "Darling son," "Rest in Peace," "Asleep in Jesus," and so on. Eventually we came to the grave of the man who had owned the plantation for many years. Under his name there was the date of his birth and the date of his death. Then there was a five-word statement that summed up his whole life: "A man of unquestioned integrity." Just five words. Nothing more, nothing less.

Suppose it was your tombstone. What five words would your friends choose? How do you want to be remembered? Here is Paul's answer to this question. Writing from a Roman jail, with the certain knowledge that he would soon be dead, he looked back at his journey with Christ, and then he looked forward to what would happen after he died. Then he wrote his own rather long epitaph:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

I would not want to pay for this epitaph!



Some Christians are hanging on to so much in this world that they might be raptured upside down when Jesus returns! This will be especially true if they do not love His appearing. No, I don't really believe in an upside Rapture but the point is that many Christians love the world more than they love His appearing.

After an exhaustive study of the men and women of the Bible, Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary concluded that there are approximately 100 detailed biographies in the Bible. He notes that approximately two-thirds of those men and women ended poorly. Either they turned to immorality or they drifted away from the faith or they ended their life in a backslidden condition. But the apostle Paul was not among them. He finished well.

Once when John Wesley was asked to explain the spiritual strength of the early Methodists, he replied, "Our people die well." But in order to die well, you have to finish well. Our text has revealed how this happens. We have learned that finishing well doesn't happen by accident. We must be seeking to live a righteous life, stay on God's path for our life, remain committed to the truth, and keep short accounts with God.

We will enjoy Christ's return if we are living righteously. There are two possibilities. As we have seen, some believers will love or enjoy Christ's return. But there is something else Paul had in mind when speaking about loving Christ's appearing.

II. Some believers will be ashamed at Christ's return.

Apparently not every believer will love Christ's appearing by what Paul is conveying here. One again, the verb form ("love his appearing" - 2 Timothy 4:8) implies a steadfast love for Christ's appearing, a love that has not lost its zeal because of sin, disobedience, and backsliding. This statement ("love his appearing") is spoken from an accountability standpoint. If we do not have our lives in order when Jesus returns, then we will not love Christ's appearing because of sin and compromise in our personal lives. Not all Christians are anxious for the Lord to return since some know they need to change their way of living. The expression "them that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) is not a reference to every believer in spite of what some commentators and Calvinists suggest about this verse. What kind of reward would it be if everyone (every Christian) gets this same righteous reward? Not everyone is going to receive the crown or reward of righteousness for they will not be living a righteous life from God's perspective.

2 Timothy 4:10

"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

By the way, have you ever felt like Paul – forsaken by Christians who you thought might stick with you? Paul was simply sharing his thoughts about Demas, but he was not overcome by this and his ministry was not destroyed by this man's departure. We must be careful of being caught up in the emotional train and possess a "woe is me" mentality. Tough times call for Spirit-filled Christians to stand up when others are failing and faltering. We need the fresh wind of the Spirit to work in our hearts and lives.

Here is the point. You cannot love the present world and love His appearing at the same time! When we are captivated by the system we cannot be controlled by the Savior! In other words, they may be found with their hand caught or stuck in the cookie jar. There is some truth to the matter of "the perseverance of the saints" in that God's saints will not totally and finally apostatize from the faith and fail to bring forth some fruit in their lives which gives evidence of their salvation. This is because God's life and nature is indwelling them (Phil. 2:13). However, "all them" (2 Tim. 4:8) does not refer to all Christians, since not every Christian will persevere in sanctification, holiness, and righteous living up to Christ's coming. For this reason, they will not all love Christ's appearing.

Some teach that all the saints will persevere up to the end without leading carnal lives but will be victorious in the end. This sounds good in Reformed Theological books but it's not in God's Book! Some people preach their theology but not God's theology. This text is not suggesting that every Christian will be prepared and ready for Christ's coming. It is actually teaching the opposite. This is because not every Christian loves the Lord as he or she should. For this reason, they will not love Christ's appearing, since they have been living sinful and shameful lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:7-9 reminds us to live spiritual lives in light of Christ's return:

"For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation (the future prospect of the Rapture and our deliverance from the Tribulation Period). For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul is teaching that we should awake from our spiritual lethargy and sinful living. Why? It's because Jesus is coming again. Our final redemption and reward awaits us at Christ's return. We are about to cross the finish line, so keep in the race!

Romans 13:11-12 echoes the same truth:

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”

These admonitions would be meaningless if every Christian perseveres in the same manner up to the coming of Christ and everyone received the crown of righteousness. There is a very real possibility of living in defeat, not experiencing the kind of victory you can have in your Christian life, not living a righteous life, and therefore you would not be ready for Christ’s return and love His appearing. Although all Christians will bear some fruit and transformation in their lives (demonstrating signs of regenerating life) the Bible does teach they can become carnal (1 Cor. 3:3), backslidden (2 Timothy 4:10) and live their lives independent of God’s will. Not every Christian will persevere in a life of marked victory and holiness, as they should and could, and not every Christian will necessarily love Christ’s initial appearing, when the trumpet sounds and they see and stand before the Lord.

A question must be asked in light of this verse: Will I love His appearing? If we as one of God’s children have not been fighting, running, or remaining a good steward at the time when Jesus returns, then we will not love His appearing. We will be caught off guard and not have our lives in order for the day and time we meet Jesus.

Tom Constable said this of the crown of righteousness:

“This reward (victor’s crown, Gr. stephanos) will go to all Christians like Paul who by the way they lived demonstrated a longing for the Lord’s return. Not all Christians are anxious for the Lord to return since some know they need to change their way of living.”

2 Corinthians 5:10 declares:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body (*receive reward or loss of reward*), according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (worthy or worthless).

What if we have known sin in our hearts and lives when Jesus returns? What if we have been disobedient to the Lord in some specific and KNOWN area? What if we

have marriage problems and we possess an unforgiving spirit with our marriage partners? What if we have been living our own life, doing our own thing, and having our own fling? As God's saints, we will not love Christ's appearing if we have sin in our hearts and are living in open rebellion against God at the time of Christ's return.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the time (*hypocritical and unwarranted judgment of a person's motives*), until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts (*inspection*): and then shall every man have praise of God (*reward*).

Theodore Epp said it well:

"There is a day coming when our Lord is going to turn on the spiritual X-ray machine and will reveal the true motives or realities of the heart."

Of course, there is no such thing as a partial Rapture (the partial Rapture theory) which teaches that only those Christians in fellowship with God go up in the Rapture. The Scriptures do not teach this false doctrine. We are saved by grace and we are going to Heaven by grace and we are all going up at the same time because of His grace! The language of Scripture teaches that all of God's New Testament saints will be raptured to Heaven. The Rapture includes all Christians.

1 Corinthians 15:52 reveals that all Christians will be raptured:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

These are inclusive statements. The entire Church is going up in the Rapture (the good, bad, and the ugly!) when Jesus returns and He will take us to the place He has prepared for us in glory (John 14:1-3). Nevertheless, it's one thing to fly away to Heaven on the wings of grace but it's an altogether different matter regarding loving Christ's appearing. If we are not living a righteous life, we will not love the

initial appearing of Christ, nor will we receive the crown of righteousness. This is what Paul is teaching.

Paul is saying that not every believer will love Christ's appearing when He initially returns for His saints. The text does not assume that every believer will lovingly embrace Christ's return. It says, "them also that love his appearing" which in this context is not an inclusive statement referencing all believers. It does not mean that all the saints will receive this specific crown of righteousness for living a righteous at His return. Not everybody gets a trophy this time! Some Christians will be caught with unconfessed sins, unforgiving hearts, gossiping, and carrying out their own sinful and rebellious ways against God.

Once again, don't misunderstand what Paul is teaching here. Yes, there will be great joys associated with Christ's coming for all Christians! This is undeniable. All Christians will ultimately enjoy what follows the Rapture – their reunion with their saved loved ones, their reward, and their relationship with Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 says:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

We will meet our loved ones and there will be a grand reunion! There will be great blessings associated with His coming which includes a new body (never growing old again), restored and renewed fellowships with our loves ones, and living with Jesus! This will mean great joy for all believers. There is a sense that every Christian because of their grace-relationship with Jesus Christ will love and experience great joy as a result of the Rapture and their subsequent reward that they do receive at His coming (1 Cor. 4:5).

Nevertheless, there will also be great sorrow associated with Rapture because of the condition of our lives (a lack of spirituality and living) when Jesus returns and the loss of reward that we will sense and experience because we were living an unsanctified, unholy, and uncommitted life. Our hearts will be broken that we were not living for Christ at His return and that we have missed the opportunity to receive the crown of righteousness. Let us never forget the reality of this!

“If He should come today
And find my hands so full
Of future plans, however fair,
In which my Saviour has no share,
What would He say?

If He should come today
And find my love so cold,
My faith so very weak and dim
I had not even looked for Him.
What would He say?

If He should come today
And find that I had not told
One soul about my Heavenly Friend
Whose blessings all my way attend,
What would He say?

If He should come today
Would I be glad, quite glad'
Remembering that He died for all
And none through me had heard His call,
What would He say?”

Why will some Christians not enjoy His appearing?

The answer is twofold.

1. Because of reward that is lost.

Paul taught that he would receive a “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8) for living for Christ and loving His appearing. This indicates that not every Christian will receive this particular crown, if they are living in sin and not looking for the return of Christ. In one sense, we can squander away this specific reward and for this reason alone we will not love His appearing. We will lose this specific reward that we otherwise could have gained had we remained faithful to the Lord up to coming.

1 Corinthians 3:15 states that we can lose reward, which would include the crown of righteousness: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." There will be much to gain at the Judgment Seat of Christ but also much to lose. What will be lost is not our salvation since we have eternal life (John 6:47). What will be lost is reward that we otherwise could have obtained for all eternity, if we had lived for Jesus Christ in a greater and more committed way. Here is the point, if we are caught with sin in our hearts and lives, known rebellion and worldliness, then we will not love Christ's appearing. One reason is that we will know that we have lost some reward which we otherwise could have received.

2 John 1:8

"Look to yourselves (watch out – stay spiritually alert!), that we (both John and his people to whom he writes) lose not those things which we have wrought (the truth that was taught among the people by the apostles), but that we (together – both John and the lay people) receive a full reward" (for embracing the truth and living righteously at Christ's return).

As we often say, "We must stick to the stuff!" This is especially important when considering gaining eternal reward. I do not believe this is talking about losing reward we had already acquired but losing reward, which we otherwise could have gained, if we had been more faithful and committed to God's Word and truth. Losing reward would include losing the crown of righteousness which is the reward for having our lives in spiritual order when Jesus returns. Loss of reward is not something we should take lightheartedly. This loss will be readily known to us and it will be heartbreaking ("he shall suffer loss" – 1 Cor. 3:15). There is an aspect of real suffering and loss being taught here in the Scripture. To contemplate that we could have gained much more reward, even the crown of righteousness, if we had been living for Christ, up to the time of His coming, will be readily known and a heart-wrenching loss. If we are going to love Christ's appearing, then we must remain faithful and committed to Christ up to the time when He returns for His Church.

"O the years in sinning wasted;
Could I but recall them now,
I would give them to my Savior,
To His will I'd gladly bow."

Will you bow to the Master's will and way over your life? Will you prepare yourself for His coming? Friend, will you be ready for the coming of Jesus?

2. Because of regret and shame.

1 John 2:28

"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

This verse reveals the very real possibility that some believers will experience "shame" before Christ when He returns in the Rapture. If a Christian is living in open rebellion and sin against God, he or she will experience real remorse for their wayward living. If you have open and known sin that is not confessed (1 John 1:9), you will experience shame for that when Jesus returns. If you have been neglecting your giving and overall service to the Lord (stewardship) then you will experience real remorse and regret when Jesus returns. Disobedient, selfish living, unfulfilling our marriage roles, lack of commitment to church and supporting God's work, and living our own life in our own way will result not only in loss of reward (the crown of righteousness), but also great shame when we see the Lord Jesus for the first time!

People will often say, "I can hardly imagine what it will be like to see Jesus and Heaven." Yes, this is true. But there is another side to this. Imagine standing before Jesus Christ for the very first time, and in your heart, you will know that you were a spiritual failure. Imagine standing before Him for the first time with known sin in your heart and a lack of commitment to stewardship and Christian living. Imagine what it will be like! If we would stop and just reflect on how awesome this day will be and how shameful we will be on this day, filled with regrets and sorrow for not finishing the race, then we would once again return to spiritual disciplines in our lives (1 Cor. 9:24-28) in light of His return.

Beloved, keep short accounts with God! As 1 Timothy 5:22 declares: "neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." Why? It's because Jesus is coming again and I will stand before Him for the very first time as either a faithful steward or a failing saint who has been negligent in his duty and living. If Jesus Christ were to return right now, would you be ashamed to meet Him? Is there known disobedience in your heart and life? What kind of sins have you been hiding? Are

there some sins that you need to confess to Him today (1 John 1:9)? Must you make something right with another person? To the best of your knowledge, is your heart right and your life right before God? The return of Jesus Christ is to have a sanctifying influence over our lives.

1 John 3:2-3

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

Accountability is one way to maintain purity. We are accountable to the Lord and when He returns there will be a day of reckoning for our slothful and sinful living. There will be shame experienced and a real sense of lost reward. Brethren, it's time to get right and live right. It's time to clean up, get up, and serve the Lord. Jesus is coming again! The return of Jesus Christ is to have a sanctifying influence over our lives. We are accountable to the Lord and when He returns there will be a day of reckoning for our slothful and sinful living. There will be shame experienced and a real sense of lost reward.

Titus 2:12-13

“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

We are called upon to reject sinful living in light of the blessed hope of Christ's return. The blessed hope of Christ's imminent return is to have a daily, sanctifying effect upon our hearts and lives. I want to meet my Lord without shame and regret! I don't want to be caught living an idle, compromising, and worldly life. I don't want to be living in some kind of open and known rebellion against the Lord. I believe that the loss of reward (the crown of righteousness) and shame will be cutting to the heart and very real on the day of His appearing!

We will stand before the Lord, look in His eyes for the very first time, and know that we were inwardly and outwardly disobedient to Him, when He came to receive us unto Himself. We will know that we refused to do what He told us to do and live the way He wanted us to live. Perhaps we did not follow Him in believer's

baptism, we did not cultivate forgiveness in our hearts toward someone, or we did not obey Him in some specific area of our lives. And now it's too late! Jesus has returned for us and we are standing before Him ashamed, regretful, and filled with remorse.

1 John 2:28

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

Instead of shame, we can be confident that we are living a life of purity and doing the Master's will, when He returns.

1 John 4:17 also declares:

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”

The “day of judgment” refers to the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ for Christians (2 Cor. 5:10). It is the day of accountability before the Lord for the kind of life that we have lived and were living when Jesus returns for us. This verse is teaching that the believer can possess “boldness” or confidence in relationship to the return of Jesus Christ. He can be confident that his life is pure and that he is not harboring any sin in his heart and life. In this context, the believer can be confident that he will not be ashamed at Christ's return if he has been loving others as Jesus would. In general, we must also be in love with Jesus Christ and living for Him when He returns, if we are going to love His appearing.

Beloved, our life will be assessed at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12–15). On this solemn occasion, at the final exam, a believer may have confidence that God will approve the quality of his living. The confidence that accompanies Christ's return stems from the reality that we were loving others as Christ loved them and also that we were loving the Lord Jesus and living a righteous life when He returns, instead of engaging in sinful living. We are to keep our hearts and lives in tune with Jesus and others (James 5:9) knowing that Christ could return at any moment. We must get our spiritual ducks in a row in view of Christ's imminent return for us in the Rapture.

2 Timothy 4:8

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Will you love His appearing? Not every Christian will love Christ’s appearing if his life is not in spiritual order. We will experience real shame and regret, loss of reward, knowing that Jesus returned for us while our hearts were indifferent to spiritual disciplines and commitments, and our lives were disobedient to His call for cleansing and discipleship. Is there some sin that you have been trying to cover or hide? What about those secret sins? Is there some sin that needs to be confessed? Have you been disobedient in some area of your life? Is your heart right before God and others? Are you harboring bitterness in your life? Have you been living a carnal life? What is the direction and trajectory of your life? What kind of record are you leaving behind as you walk through life?

One might wonder if some Christians will reflect upon their past life in the way Theodore W. Brennan recorded in his poem.



“I looked upon a farm one day.
That once I used to own;
The barn had fallen to the ground.
The fields were overgrown.

The house in which my children grew.
Where we had lived for years --
I turned to see it broken down.
And brushed aside the tears.

I looked upon my soul one day.
To find it too had grown
With thorns and nettles everywhere.
The seeds neglect had sown.
The years had passed while I had cared
For things of lesser worth:
The things of Heaven I let go
When minding things of Earth.

To Christ I turned with bitter tears.
And cried, "O Lord, forgive!
I haven't much time left for Thee,
Not many years to live."

The wasted years forever gone,
The days I can't recall;
If I could live those days again.
I'd make Him Lord of all."