

consciousness of the Lord's imminent return has in the life of a believer.

John, for instance, asserts: "*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*" (I Jn. 3:3). In other words, it is the awesome prospect of seeing the glorified Lord Jesus Christ in His dazzling, resplendent purity, as John saw Him on the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:10-17), that prompts the believer to purify his heart and life of every defiling element, lest the penetrating gaze of the Son of God discover some unrelinquished weight or besetting sin (Heb. 12:1,2) in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16).

It is not, however, merely the thought of beholding the glorified Lord (though in itself awesome!) that awakens the true Christian to soul-cleansing action. There is also the sobering awareness of *what will transpire* when we see Him—a searching inspection and assessment of every detail of our lives. It was this profound thought that motivated Paul when he wrote, under divine inspiration, in a strain not unlike that of John: "*Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that which he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...*" (II Cor. 5:9-11a). The "blessed hope" is thus not a *blithely* one, void of any prospect of requital for the deeds done in the body. The solemn nature of such an inescapable appointment (one that you will

be sure to keep!) at the judgment bar of Christ should therefore provoke every conscientious Christian to a deeper and more comprehensive purity (Ps. 24:3,4). Indeed, apart from such an awakening hope (I Jn. 3:3), the flesh, which is in itself prone to both sloth and spiritual slumber, would remain in a state of stupor, and render the believer asleep in that fateful day when "he that cometh will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37).

John and Paul, however, are not the only inspired writers of Scripture to note the indispensable moral corrective supplied by a vibrant hope in the imminent return of Jesus Christ to earth. Peter also, in his second epistle, underscores the necessity of godly living in anticipation of Christ's coming in judgment: "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat...be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless*" (II Pet. 3:11,12,13,14).

In addition, our Lord Himself warned of the spiritual and moral peril inherent in the supposition that the Lord has delayed His coming. Stressing the need of preparation for His sudden return, He said, "*But and if that evil servant will say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming...the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him...and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*" (Matt. 24:48-51).

Individuals who fancy that the Lord lingers inevitably find it increasingly difficult to restrain themselves from the innate human tendency to self-centered and indulgent living. This plain warning from the lips of our Lord conveys a crystal-clear message: *to lose one's love for the imminent appearance of Christ from Heaven is to forfeit a vital and necessary incentive to godly living.*

An Age of Religious Skepticism

Despite the fact that the foregoing assertion should be considered axiomatic by every Bible-believing Christian, we are living in an age of religious skepticism that smiles condescendingly upon the enthusiastic talk of "signs of His soon return" and the eager scramble by earnest Christians to find a correlation between prodigious current events and the fulfillment of predictive, Bible prophecy. Let one presume to broadcast that "the day is at hand" (Rom. 13:12) and he is sure to encounter, ere long, a flurry of opposition—albeit religious—from those who seem to despise the thought that the Lord might come suddenly and thereby interrupt their carefully devised plans, or curtail their opportunities for earthly enjoyment. For good measure, these skeptics may also allude to the admitted folly of past "date-setters" (those who seek on the basis of alleged Biblical evidence to predict a date for the Lord's return—a lamentable exercise in futility into which speculative minds are sometimes ensnared [Mk. 13:32,33]) as a cogent warning to the "overzealous" and "unbalanced" who would "misemploy" their energies in Biblical stud-

ies and animated discussions concerning the nearness of the Lord's return. When exhorted concerning the urgent need of preparation, these time-servers may dismiss the idea with references to the fact that many alleged signs of the Second Advent have been recognizable in almost every generation, therefore, "Why should there be cause for alarm?" What is more, they seem to be perfectly comfortable in their assumption that a "once-upon-a-time" identification with the truths of Christianity is sufficient preparation for any apocalyptic "dooms-day".

It is well to remember that the Spirit of God warned of such scoffers. Peter penned words that pin-point their skepticism as being in itself a sign of the last days: "*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts...*" (II Pet. 3:3).

All in all, one thing is patently clear: such rationalistic religionists have lost their love for Christ's appearing (on the assumption that they originally possessed it—cf. II Tim. 4:8; Matt. 24:12). They can no longer identify with the expectant attitude of the early church in its pristine purity, whose citizenship was in heaven, from whence also it looked for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20). Unable to recognize the signs that make our generation one of *prophetic fulfillment*, and unwilling to arise and "trim their lamps" (Matt. 25:7) in preparation for the coming Bridegroom, these lukewarm religionists are in danger of being unpleasantly surprised by the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The

flickering flame of their lost devotion will leave them sleeping in the day of His sudden return (Mark 13:33-37), and their extreme folly will be manifest to all.

Moreover, these misguided individuals are decidedly wrong in their assumption that initial belief, or assent to the truths of Christianity, is sufficient preparation for Christ's coming. Even a casual reading of such passages as Romans 13:11-14; Matt. 25:1-13; Luke 21:36; II Pet. 1:5-11; and II Pet. 3:14 reveals the absolute necessity of an ardent spiritual effort, motivated by sincere faith in Jesus Christ, if we are to escape the wrath to come. Only those who refuse to gratify the sinful impulses of the flesh (Rom. 13:14), remain spiritually alert in an attitude of incessant prayer (Luke 21:36), and give the utmost diligence to make their calling and election sure by "adding to their faith" the enumerated Christian virtues (II Pet. 1:5-11), will be found by Him "in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 3:14).

But now, dear reader, to be more personal and to the point: "In what state will that fateful day find you?" Will it find you "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1) as you content yourself with a barren head-knowledge *about Jesus Christ* in the place of a vibrant faith *in Him* as God come in the flesh to die on the Cross for your sins? Will it find you dismissing the distant rumblings on the horizon, which herald the awful climax of human history as we know it, as a mere figment of your imagination, or will you believe the predictions of the Bible and be true to your own intuitive awareness

that the "day is at hand"? Yes, dear serious reader, how will that day find you—frantically seeking one final fling of fleshly fun, or fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ?

Would you be ready, assured of safe shelter and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ? You can be. How? Simply by calling on the name of Jesus Christ in genuine godly sorrow for your sins and asking Him to be merciful to you, a sinner (Romans 10:13; Luke 18:13,14). Psalm 51:17 says that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart. He will save you from your sins and the misery of eternal hell now. Receive Him this moment in simple, childlike faith (John 1:12), lest the day of the Lord come upon you unawares and find you slumbering in sin:

"Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37).

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?
(Acts 16:31)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Acts 16:31).

Repent (turn from) your sins (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21).

Confess the Lord Jesus Christ with your mouth (Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32).

Continue in His Word (John 8:31; Acts 2:42).

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus in day-to-day obedience (discipleship) (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23).

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KNOWING the TIME:

An Indispensable Incentive to Perfection in Holiness

"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. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:11-14; emphasis mine).

As clearly as God can say it, Romans 13:11-14 declares that it is an all important understanding of "the time"—that is, contemporary conditions in both Christendom and the world that highlight the lateness of the hour and the nearness of the Lord's return—that should add spark to our incentive to mortify fleshly lusts (Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:5) while we "perfect holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1).

In fact, the Scriptures have much to say about the practical, purifying effect that a