

## Love His Appearing (2 Timothy 4:8)

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The use of the perfect participle of ἀγαπάω in our scriptural reference indicates that the apostle looks upon loving the appearing of our Lord Jesus on Judgment day as something which comes to pass at the beginning of the Christian experience and continues into the present. This fact made us bold to use the imperative in the title of this article.

If you who are reading this article were to be informed that his appearing would take place within the hour, what would your reaction be? Would you become joyfully excited and exult, “Finally the day has come”? Or would a feeling of uneasiness grip your heart as you recalled the sins of omission and commission in your immediate past? Here’s the test. If we focus upon the bad, the good, or even upon the quality of our faith, there will be uneasiness and apprehension which will dilute our love for his appearing. But if we face the judgment which will be ushered in by his appearing with our eyes fixed upon who he is and what he has done for us, we shall be able to love his appearing and rejoice when it occurs. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). We face the fact of our sinfulness and sinning frankly. But he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pe 2:24). He blotted “out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col 2:14). His resurrection is God’s great declaration that the sacrifice which his Son brought to blot out our sins was adequate and accepted. Jesus “was raised again for our justification” (Ro 4:25). Our justification is as real as was the fact of our guilt. This is the plea which we shall raise in our defense, yes, the plea which even now he who is coming as judge is raising before this Father. “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Ro 8:34). This is what led Paul to love his appearing: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tm 4:8). Looking away from ourselves and looking only at what he is and has done for us, we may be sure of a favorable outcome in the judgment, and therefore love his appearing.

Because of what he is and has done for us we love him even now in spite of the fact that we cannot see him with our physical eyes. How great will be our joy when we shall see him face to face and go to be with him in glory forever. “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pe 1:8). That’s why we love his appearing and look forward to it.

Loving his appearing ought to be spontaneous both because we shall see him whom we love more dearly than life itself and on the basis of his saving work be found righteous, and also because of what his appearing will usher in. When he appears, however, this present world will cease to be. If there is anything of Lot’s wife in us, this won’t be a pleasant thought. No more golf, no more fishing, no more football, no more satisfaction because of wise investments, no more respect and recognition from men, no more successes, no more family joys as we know them—expand the list to include whatever causes you particular pleasure and then ask yourself whether you can think of leaving it behind without a tinge of regret because your Lord has appeared and you will go to be with him forever. Will there be no looking back, but only looking ahead with excited joy?

Skeptics have ridiculed our Christian faith by saying that all we think of is “pie in the sky by and by.” But they miss the point. It is not a matter of either-or, but of both-and. Of course there are good things in this present world. And the Lord wants us to bear them in mind. “Forget not all his benefits.” (Ps 103:2). Forgetting comes easily, and so does murmuring. It is possible to hold one adverse experience, one loss so closely before our eyes that we fail to see the many benefits which the Lord had showered upon us. By all means remember the good things which are given to us in this present world and thank the Lord for them. But view them in perspective. The best of them is as nothing compared with what Jesus will give us at his appearing. He will welcome us home, we shall ever be with him, we shall be like him; our knowledge will be perfect, our joy

unending, our praise never ceasing. That's what he will bring at his appearing. Who would not love it? We may take a sightseeing trip and enjoy the many interesting places we visit. But there comes a time when we reach a saturation point and look forward to returning to the settled life and comforts of home. If there were no returning home to anticipate, there would be little joy in endless wandering. So we enjoy to the full the blessings which come to us during our journey through this present world because we may look forward to his appearing, to going home to heaven to be with him forever.

Loving his appearing will give us the right perspective in our professional life. We are beset by the temptation to set our sights too low. What is our goal? Is it to prepare another class for confirmation or graduation? Is it to plan and develop a smoothly functioning organization with a clearly established chain of command and alert and dedicated participation? Is it to plan and implement a stewardship program which guarantees balanced budgets, punctual amortization, adequate leeway for expansion? Is it to have church property and school property on every level which are beautiful, efficient and well kept? These are commendable secondary goals but in themselves belong to this present world which will pass away.

As we ourselves love his appearing, our chief goal will be to train those whom we serve also to love his appearing, and to swell their number. We have the good tradition of devoting the last Sundays of the church year to eschatological truths: death, resurrection, judgment, eternal life. As we do justice to this emphasis, we shall encourage our people to love his appearing. But just as the resurrection of our Lord is too important to refer to it only on Easter Sunday, so too training people to love his appearing is too important to restrict it to the last Sundays of the church year. We can learn a lesson from the writers of many of our cherished hymns. Most of the stanzas of a hymn may treat of a variety of scriptural truths which bear upon the present. But the last stanza or two looks ahead to his appearing. Now we do not want to become stereotyped so that our people expect us in every sermon to say something about his appearing and that often in the same words. But if we love his appearing ourselves, we won't consider references to his appearing off limits on Sundays other than the last of the church year. As the occasion warrants, we shall reflect our own love for his appearing and congratulate our people because they share the same love.

The day of his appearing is drawing ever closer. If, indeed, it will be the most wonderful day we shall ever experience—and it will be—why doesn't the Lord usher it in now instead of keeping us waiting here? He has answered that question for us. "The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pe 3:9). If that day had come a century ago, you and I would never have been born, nor born again, nor made heirs of glory. But the Lord had our names on the list of his elect and those who had already been brought in had to wait until we too had been brought in. So today there are still those out there whom the Lord has elected but who still need to hear the Good News through which he will accomplish his purpose to bring them to saving faith. We don't know how long the list of their names is. But it may well be short. How much reason for us to get the Good News out so that the Lord's business with the human race in this present world may be finished and our longing for his appearing may be stilled! We are people who are in a hurry because we love his appearing!