

The Blessed Hope!

(Titus 2:13)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to go on a trip to Florida so that I could visit a Christian College campus. As a pastor, I had been given a free plane ticket to fly down and visit the Christian college. I was there for several days. In these days there were no cell phones to stay in contact with my wife. Upon my return flight, I began to be full of joy and expectation, since I knew that I would soon see my lovely wife again. As the airplane taxied up to the place where it would connect to the walkway, I was looking forward to seeing my wife.

As I walked through the connecting walkway from the airplane to the main terminal, I was ready to see her. My heart was overjoyed knowing that at any moment I was about to see her face to face. I was prepared to set my eyes upon her. I was expecting to embrace her and be reunited with her. This was the thrilling expectation and blessed hope that filled my heart on this particular day. I was about to see my wife. Nothing could stop me from seeing her. In a moment's time we would meet and share our lives together once again. I had the absolute confidence and inner hope that when I walk into the airport terminal we would be reunited and experience great blessing and fellowship together.

This same confidence and expectancy are to be in the believer's heart regarding the blessed hope of Christ's coming. In this study, I would like to address the Biblical topic of the blessed hope. There is a hope that we are to possess as Christian, which is to be a captivating and thrilling expectation in our hearts and lives. It's the hope of the imminent return of Christ. As I was flying back to Pennsylvania and walking into the terminal, I was positive that no person was going to steal this imminent hope of reunion and blessing from my heart. In a similar way, we must not allow any person, false teaching, or inaccurate view on the timing of the Rapture steal the hope of the imminent return of Christ from our hearts.

Realization of the Blessed Hope

In the Scriptures, the Bible addresses the coming of Christ in the Rapture as a blessed hope for His saints. It is to be a constant expectancy and captivating assurance that Jesus could come at any moment, that we would see Him face to face in all of His glory and splendor and experience our final redemption and release from all sin. The blessed hope that the believer has in his heart is related to the imminent return of our Lord. As we will see, this is the hope that believers will be rescued from all trials and tribulations connected with planet earth, even the coming Tribulation Period of seven years, and also the hope of experiencing the final redemption of their bodies.

Titus 2:13 says:

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The coming of Jesus Christ is connected with the blessed hope in the believer's heart and this event is pictured as an imminent return, meaning that it could happen at any moment. Both the return of Jesus Christ and the hope of the believer connected with this return are based upon imminency. The word “looking” is a word of expectancy and would indicate the any moment nature of Christ's return.

The Oxford English Dictionary of 1901 describes the meaning of the term imminent as an event “hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence.” Thus, imminence carries with it the idea that Christ could come at any moment. It means that nothing else must take place before it happens. If something else must take place before it happens then it destroys the whole meaning and concept of imminency. The word “imminent” would then speak of something that is about to happen. Christian friend, the coming of Jesus Christ is impending. It is hanging over our heads! Christ's coming is pictured as being at the door (“behold, the judge standeth before the door” – James 4:9).

Because the coming of Christ is imminent, as we will see in this study, believers are exhorted to keep their eyes to the sky and stand on their tiptoes in eagerness and anticipation of Christ's return in the

air for His Church. This is when Christ will appear as “the bright and morning star” to take His Bride home to be with Him (Rev. 22:16; John 14:1-3). Christ’s Bride is the New Testament Church (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17) and His coming is a blessed hope to those of us who are eagerly anticipating His imminent return, when we will see Him face to face, and when we are released from all of our trials and are given a new body. Jesus could return at any moment. And believers are waiting to peer around the last turn in the road so that they might see the Lord face to face. We should be waiting with a captivating and delightful expectancy knowing that I might see Him at any moment.

Paul wrote these words to Titus in order to stress the imminency of Christ’s return and how His any moment appearance or return is to be the “blessed hope” within our hearts as we travel throughout our journey on earth. Christ’s coming for the church is first of all “blessed” (makarious) which means that it offers to us supreme happiness. The promise of Christ’s return grants happiness in our day-to-day living as we anticipate how we will be released from our present hardships in life and be ushered into a glorious future of eternal bliss and happiness.

The coming of Christ is also “hope” which means joyful and confident expectation. We can presently possess in our hearts a joyful anticipation knowing that the Rapture, which could occur at any moment, will deliver us from all of our trials on earth, even the coming tribulation night that is going to fall upon the world (Rev. 3:10). At the same time, the Rapture will grant to us our complete salvation from the very presence of sin. This is a blessed and happy hope that we can possess as believers. In short, the blessed hope is connected with the return of Christ and teaches us that Christ could return at any moment and provide us with our final redemption from sin and release from all earthly trial, turmoil and judgment – including the seven-year Tribulation Period which is yet to come upon planet earth.

The Rescue of the Blessed Hope

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 states:

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord

so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 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. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

The “times and seasons” (vs. 1) have to do with God’s prophetic calendar for the nation of Israel. These times and seasons will be fulfilled during the coming Tribulation period called “the day of the Lord” (vs. 2). This period is primarily Jewish in character since it is called the “time of Jacobs’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). During this time God will resume His dealings with the nation of Israel and the endtime events that the OT prophets spoke about will actually occur on planet earth. The “times” (duration or length of time) and the “seasons” (the state of the time and characteristics of the time) in connection with the Day of the Lord were not something that Paul needed to address.

Paul felt no need to write to the Thessalonians about the times and the seasons related to the “day of the Lord” or the time of Tribulation judgment. Why? Paul no doubt may have spoken to them about these things already during his visit with them (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Furthermore, the Old Testament revelation was very clear about this time of judgment. It’s also worthy to note that Paul would not have to spend any more detail about these “times and seasons” related to the Day of the Lord since this specific time and the events associated with the Day of the Lord would not affect the saints. They would be taken to Heaven before these prophetic epochs of time would begin. So when Paul says that he has “no need that I write unto you” he has all these things in mind.

The point is this, the Church is looking for a Person, not for the times and seasons of the Day of the Lord to begin. We are to be looking for the Savior’s return and not the events of the Tribulation period to

begin. These saints would not be here during the Tribulation period. However, the unsaved will enter the Tribulation Period as indicated by the pronouns “they” and “them” – (vs. 3-4). But the saved will not enter the Tribulation period as indicated by the words and pronouns “brethren,” “yourselves,” “ye” and “us” – (vs. 2, 4, 6). The Church saints are “of the day” (vs. 8) which means that they are characterized by the spiritual illumination of salvation and uprightness and delivered out of the domain of satanic darkness (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9) whereas the unsaved are “of the night” (vs. 5) and are characterized by spiritual darkness, which is the habitual sphere of satanic blindness and sin in which the unsaved world lives (Eph. 4:18; 5:11).

1 Thessalonians 5:8 then goes on to say:

“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 “hope of salvation” that all believers can look forward to is the Lord’s return and their deliverance from the wrath to come. It is clear from the context that this is a specific time of wrath that Paul has in mind. It is the wrath of the Tribulation days, which has a specific duration of time attached to it (“times”) and a specific characteristic of judgment (“seasons”) that will occur during its fulfillment (vs. 1). Paul already told the Thessalonians that they were saved from the wrath of hell through God’s saving program of election and grace (1 Thess. 1:4-5). They had already experienced salvation from the penalty of sin. The “hope of salvation” deals with the deliverance from a specific time of “wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:5) which is the future Tribulation Period. The redeemed followers of Christ have a sure hope, a blessed hope; they are not as others who have no hope.

We are given the promise of exemption from the Day of the Lord (vs. 2) because we are not like “them” (vs. 3) who are of the night and who are going to experience God’s hand of judgment. The hope of deliverance refers specifically to the Rapture of the Church, which takes place prior to the Tribulation Period. The coming of Christ is in view since Paul speaks in this context (vs. 10) about being physically alive (“wake”) at His return or sleeping (“sleep”) which refers to the death of believers (see 1 Cor. 15:51-52). The promise is sure. All believers have the confident hope and assurance of being rescued

from this world before the Tribulation storm hits. This is called “the hope of salvation” or deliverance from this dreadful time of judgment to come upon planet earth. This is the hope, the blessed hope of deliverance from God’s specific seven-year period of wrath, which is going to be unleashed upon planet earth. So, the word “hope” is used in connection with the Lord’s return and rescue from the Tribulation Period. We do have a blessed hope of escaping God’s time of coming wrath upon earth.

In verse eight “the breastplate of faith and love” probably deals with our present relationship with the Lord and how we need to possess a proper walk and dependency upon Him for protection from the darkness and the Evil One (Eph. 6:10). But the “hope of salvation” (vs. 8) is that blessed hope of the future. It deals with an eschatological hope. We are not looking to enter the Tribulation Period of God’s wrath. I don’t see how there could be any rejoicing and hope in this! We are not to be looking for the “times and the seasons” that relate to the Day of the Lord. We are looking for that blessed hope, which is the consummation of our salvation and deliverance from the wrath of the Tribulation Period.

When Paul speaks of the “helmet, the hope of salvation” (vs. 8) he is saying that these believers could protect their minds from worry and despair. They could possess the certainty and assurance in their own minds that they will be delivered from the Day of the Lord. This is what wearing the “helmet of the hope of salvation” means. Their minds should not be tormented by uncertainty as to whether or not they will be overtaken by this coming judgment. Since they are children of the day, they will not be brought into the future time period when God judges the children of the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What a blessed hope this is! It’s the hope of deliverance from the terrible time of judgment that is going to be poured out upon the world. The blessed hope pertains to the Rapture of the Church from this time of unprecedented wrath that is going to be unleashed upon

this world. And believers today can have peace of mind knowing that they have been delivered from this specific time of wrath.

There are many believers today who do not possess this hope in their hearts since they reject the Biblical teaching of Christ's imminent return and since they expect to enter the Tribulation Period which is a time of God's direct judgment upon the world. Therefore, they do not have the thrilling hope and joyous expectation of departure from all trials and tribulation, at any moment, or rescue from the specific coming tribulation judgment upon earth, since they reject the teaching about the imminent coming of Jesus Christ. Many saints cannot live on the edge of their seats eagerly awaiting their sudden or spontaneous redemption and glory because of their failure to believe in the imminent return of Christ. They cannot say with John the apostle, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

When the message of the blessed hope and imminent Return of our Lord is lost, through the shuffling of prophetic Bible texts, it's then that God's people lose a great treasure which God has intended them to possess and hold dear to their hearts.

Reaffirming the Blessed Hope

1 Peter 1:13-14 says:

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance."

Peter mentions to us about the hope we can have until the end of our lives upon earth. It's the hope that is connected with the coming of Jesus Christ. We have the hope of meeting the Lord at any moment and being rescued from the struggles and hardships we face in this world. Until then we must "gird up the loins" of our mind or be ready for action against the world system. We must be spiritually alert to Satan's working and temptation until the Lord Jesus returns and we are ushered into His presence to be forever released from worldly pressure. The assurance of Christ's Return is held out as a compelling motive to live pure or holy. It challenges us to steer clear from the world's contamination (1 Peter 1:14-15). We must have the

blessed hope in our hearts and live for the future, anticipating at any moment, the final consummation of our salvation at the Lord's coming.

The hope we have in our Lord's imminent return acts as a stimulus to live holy today and be prepared to meet the Lord by having our lives in order. The "revelation" (apokalupsis) of Jesus Christ is generally taken to refer to His coming back to earth when He will be revealed in glory. However, contextually, it can also refer to the Rapture when Christ will come for His saints (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7). Peter has already spoken about the Savior's return and the accompanying ultimate stage of salvation (vv. 5, 7, 9, 13). In 1 Peter 1:13 the Return of Christ and our subsequent blessing with the Lord is looked upon as "the grace that is to be brought unto you" which tells the story that believers will experience the operation of God's grace in their lives when Jesus returns.

This manifestation of grace, at the Lord's coming, will be showered upon God's own people in that they will receive a new perfect body, experience their final redemption from all sin and be forever with the Lord. What grace is this! What a hope we have in this future Return of Christ. As we live each day of our lives we can do so knowing that Jesus may return at any moment and bring final release and freedom from the world's pressures and every sin that wars against our soul. We have the inner hope and realization that at any moment we might experience final release from all temptation, pain and suffering.

We can be sure that the best is yet to come! The believer in Christ can possess a blessed hope in his heart knowing that at any moment the Lord may return and bring him into this place of glorious blessing. So, the blessed hope is connected with Christ's imminent return and gives us an inner joyful expectancy that Christ could return at any moment and take us out of this world. One writer said this about hope: "O hope! Dazzling, radiant hope! What a change thou bringest to the hopeless; brightening the darkened paths, and cheering the lonely way." The poet said:

"Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,
Through showers the sunbeams fall;
For God, who loveth all his works
Has left his hope with all!"

Titus 2:11-13

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 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.”

In Titus 2:11-13, Paul may be dealing with the three tenses of salvation:

- Salvation from the penalty of sin – 2:11a – “bringeth salvation”
- Salvation from the power of Sin – 2:12 – “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts”
- Salvation from the presence of sin – 2:13 – “Looking for that blessed hope”

We know that Christ’s coming is a blessed or happy hope for the very reason that believers will be freed from sin in its entirety and no longer have a sin nature to battle with (vs. 13). We know that the blessed hope includes our promised meeting with the Lord in the air before the Tribulation Period of seven years begins. This is because the blessed hope, which is connected to Christ’s coming, includes our rescue from all earthly turmoil, tests and tragedies and would also include our rescue from the dark and dreadful period of time known as the Day of the Lord (entire seven-year Tribulation Period).

We have already seen that this is true from several texts of Scripture dealing with the blessed hope in light of the Day of the Lord. But Titus 2:13 suggests within its context that the blessed hope also deals with our ultimate and final redemption from all sin (glorification) and our subsequent meeting and fellowship with the Lord in the air. My friend, there is going to be a meeting in the air in the sweet sweet by and by! And when I meet Him in the air, I will be free at last from the very presence of sin – “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:9). This is the final frontier for the believer’s life. What a hope! What a glorious prospect!

The return of Christ in Titus 2:13 is called “the glorious appearing” (lit. – “the appearing of the glory”) and speaks of the radiating glory that Christ will manifest to His bride (the Church) when He returns to take

her home to Heaven. Today the glorified Christ in Heaven manifests this radiant glory (John 17:5) and when Jesus Christ returns each living member of the church will experience what is called “the appearing of the glory” as they, for the very first time, see the face of Jesus Christ which shines “as the sun in its strength” (Rev. 1:16). What a coming! What an appearing! What a glory! What a hope!

The word “appearing” (epiphaneia) in Titus 2:13 speaks of a manifestation and relates to the Rapture when Christ will take His Church or Bride home to be with him. Thayer says this about the Greek word: “an appearing, an appearance; Often used of the glorious manifestation of the gods, and especially of their advent to help; in the New Testament the advent of Christ - not only what has already taken place and by which his presence and power appear in the saving light he has shed upon mankind, but also his illustrious return from heaven to occur in the future.”

My friend, the believer is to live with the blessed hope of Christ’s imminent coming in his heart. He is to be awaiting and expecting the happy moment and the coming glory of the Saviour who will return and receive us unto Himself. This event is to be a living day-to-day reality in our hearts. We must believe that it can take place at any moment. We must look for it and be ready for it to occur so that we are not ashamed to stand before the Lord.

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.”

It seems that above all else we must be looking for this blessed hope in view of our accountability before the Lord. The believer’s incentive to live holy and godly in the present world (Titus 2:12) only makes sense if the Lord’s coming is imminent and that at any moment, we will be held accountable to Him for our actions. We don’t want to be caught with our hands in the cookie jar! We don’t want the Lord to be ashamed at the way we are living when He returns. These saints were to be motivated to godliness because they believed that Jesus could return at any moment. If they thought that the Lord’s return and

reward were far off in the distant future, their tendency would be toward sinful and careless living as Jesus taught (Matt. 24:49-49).

The "Moody Monthly" at one time related the story of a 6-year-old, golden-haired child, who had a strong, simple faith in the truths she heard in Sunday school. She seemed especially impressed by the thought of the Lord's coming. One morning a guest in her home found the youngster busily working in her bedroom, carefully arranging the contents. Impressed by what he saw, he exclaimed, "You sure keep your room nice and neat!" Looking up with a smile, she replied, "Yes, I'm putting everything in order, 'cause Jesus might come today!"

1 John 3:2-3 also states:

"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."

The Scriptures inform us that we can have this hope in our hearts ("every man that hath this hope in him"). This inward hope is the blessed hope connected with the coming of Christ and our subsequent redemption and release from all sin and suffering. Someday when Jesus returns, "we shall be like him." The way that we will be like Christ is that we will receive an eternal glorified body without sin. What a glorious prospect this is! In the meantime, this blessed hope in our hearts, concerning Christ's imminent return ("when he shall appear"), is to have a purifying effect upon our lives. It behooves us to keep our lives in order knowing that Jesus could return at any moment.

The blessed hope is a purifying hope. If Christ could not come at any moment, then His coming would not have the same purifying effect upon our lives. But the truth is this. Jesus may come today! That makes me accountable to Him today and right now. I want to be found living for Him and not be ashamed when He returns. Once again, we see how hope is directly connected with the coming of Christ. This blessed hope or happy expectancy of Christ's return is an event that is imminent. Since this is true, we should always be prepared for this event and keep short accounts with the Lord.

The blessed hope is also a comforting hope! The younger converts at Thessalonica were concerned that their loved ones, who had died, would not be living at the time of the Rapture to experience the blessed hope of Christ's return and the subsequent redemption of their bodies. Paul writes and shares with these living saints how the bodies of their loved ones, who had gone on before them, would be resurrected, so they too would share in this glorious event (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Those who had died would be resurrected to enjoy the redemption of a new body and a glorious reunion with them in the air. So, Paul concludes by saying in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Just for argument's sake, suppose that the Church was going into the awful Tribulation Period. What would we expect to find in this passage of Scripture if this were true? We would expect these believers to be filled with joy knowing that their loved ones would miss the coming Tribulation Period on earth since they were already in Heaven. But instead, we find them grieving that their loved ones will miss the Rapture of the Church and not share in the blessed hope.

Also, if the Thessalonian saints believed that they were going into the Tribulation Period they would be grieving over their own impending trial and doom during the Tribulation Period and not their loved ones missing the glorious redemption associated with the Rapture. And if this were true the coming of Christ would certainly not be considered an event associated with comfort and hope! The model of a pretribulational Rapture fits the whole setting and message of comfort and hope, which was offered to these people. To teach that the Church will pass through the Tribulation Period and suffer at the hands of the Antichrist and experience God's seven years of wrath, is no longer a comfort and hope. Instead, just the opposite is true. The coming of Christ would be associated with fear, dread and hopelessness.

In the remainder of our study, we want to focus on some key words that teach the same expectancy and imminency of Christ's return in the Rapture. Christ's Second Coming to earth will be preceded by many signs and specific events (Matthew 24). But Christ's return in

the Rapture is a separate event from His Second Coming to earth that has no specific signs accompanying it. Therefore, the Rapture is an imminent event that has no precursor signs that need to be fulfilled before it can take place. There are many clear verses in Scripture, when taken at face value, which teach the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Because Christ's return is imminent, we can have a blessed hope abiding in our hearts today, knowing that at any moment we could be taken from this world, rescued from the coming Tribulation Period, and experience our final redemption from all sin, pain and sorrow.

Reassuring Words of the Blessed Hope

There are ten key words\phrases which teach the imminency of Christ's return and which give to us a blessed hope in our hearts today.

1. Looking

Titus 2:13

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Jude 1:21 says:

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"

In this verse Jude reminds believers to be experiencing God's love in their lives which means to possess a proper relationship with God where you can experience the love of God in your own personal life. This is the love that God expresses toward you, moment by moment of every day. God loves me! And as I keep myself in a proper relationship with the Lord, I will experience and sense God's love toward me. God's love is always beaming down upon us much like the sun. But if a cloud of sin comes between the Lord and us then we will no longer be able to enjoy the sunshine of His love or fellowship with God and experience His loving relationship in our lives. So we can keep ourselves in His love first of all by living lives of holiness and godliness. And if sin should come between us, then we should

confess and forsake that sin immediately. The secret is to let nothing come between God and us (1 John 1:5-7).

Charles

A. Tindley wrote:

“Nothing between my soul and the Savior, Naught of this world’s delusive dream; Nothing preventing the least of His favor, Keep the way clear, let nothing between.”

In this same text Jude reminds us that we should be “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” which is a direct reference to Christ’s return and our subsequent blessing with the Lord. The word “looking” once again connotes imminency and because of this we can possess a joyful expectancy knowing that Christ could return at any moment. In 1 Peter 1:13 we observed how the coming of Christ would be an act of grace (kindness) granted to us whereas in Jude 21 the coming of Christ is described as an act of mercy (compassion) displayed upon our lives.

The Rapture is an act of added grace and mercy showered upon our lives. Grace gives to us what we don’t deserve, and mercy withholds from us what we do deserve. The coming of Jesus Christ will be an act of mercy or compassion in that this event will rescue us from the Tribulation Period of God’s wrath and judgment, which we deserve, and also deliver us from this old earthly body that is worn out and heading toward the grave. The Lord in His mercy will come to our rescue.

On the other hand, the Rapture can be viewed as an act of grace in that the Lord will give to us deliverance or salvation from the “hour of temptation” or adversity that will come upon all the world (Rev. 3:10) and at the same time provide us with a new glorified body and take us home to be with Him forever. The coming of Christ involves both mercy and grace. What a blessed hope this is! Are you looking for Christ to return today? Is there a note of expectancy in your heart today? Are you sitting on the edge of your seat? The blessed hope is connected with the return of Jesus Christ and we are to be looking for His return today. We are to have a joyful note of expectancy ringing in our hearts knowing that Jesus could return at any moment and usher all believers into their future state and final frontier. Perhaps today!

Hebrews 9:28

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

The believer is exhorted to “look for him” which once again verifies the imminent return of Christ. Why should we look for Christ if He cannot come back at any moment? We are to be looking for His return because it can occur at any moment and bring us great release and freedom from this world. There is to be a note of expectancy and excitement centered around His return.

Philippians 3:20

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here is our word “look” again. The early church was looking for Jesus Christ to return in their own day and time. The early church lived with the blessed hope in their hearts that Jesus could return at any moment and usher them into their eternal state of final salvation. This was not just a brand-new feeling in the air but a hope in their hearts, a blessed hope, which gave to them inner strength for their present journey and incentive to live holy lives in view of His imminent return. Believers are not to be looking for any signs of the Tribulation Period to fall upon this world before Jesus can return. Instead, they are to be looking for the Savior (Phil. 3:19–20). Paul says that he was looking for His return to occur in his own day.

Dear friend, I am looking for Christ to return. I am not looking for the Antichrist to appear and show his face in the world. I am to be looking for the Savior! I am to be watching the sky knowing that at any moment He might break through the blue. Looking! What are you looking for today? Are you looking for the events of the seven-year Tribulation to begin? Are you looking for the Antichrist to appear on the scene? Are you looking for 666 to come into this world? Are you looking for many signs to occur before Jesus can return? What are you looking for today? What is your hope? Do you have any hope? The coming of Christ and the hope of the believer’s final redemption and release from all sin are linked to imminency. We are to be looking for the Rapture to occur today because it can take place at any

moment. For the Christian, who believes in the blessed hope, the clock is always set at 11:59!

1 Thessalonians 5:6

“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”

Church saints are to be continuously alert and “watch” for Christ to come. This is because Jesus could return at any moment. In view of this impending event of Christ’s imminent coming believers should have a continuous attitude of sobriety or alertness. They are to be awake in a sanctified manner seeking to live holy lives for the Lord in view of the imminence of Christ’s coming (parousia) in the Rapture. This is another verse to indicate that Jesus could return at any moment. And the promise in this section of Scripture, as we have already seen, clearly states that believers, who are of the day, will not take part in the future judgment with unbelievers, who are of the night. We are to lift up our heads and be watching for our blessed Lord’s return knowing that our departure and redemption is drawing nigh.

Romans 13:11 states:

“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.”

How can you look with joyful expectancy for an event to take place if it cannot take place at any given time? The promise of the blessed hope is that Jesus Christ could return at any moment and bring to us our final redemption and release from all trial and earthly turmoil. We do not have to wait to pass through one, two or three quarters of the Tribulation Period or all of the Tribulation Period before Jesus returns in the Rapture. How could the coming of Christ by a joyful expectancy and happy hope, promised to believers living today, if they knew they were going into the time of God’s judgment and would more than likely face martyrdom at the hands of the Antichrist?

What kind of reassuring hope could we possess in our hearts today, if we knew that the Lord was going to make us enter the horror of the coming night of tribulation (Matt. 24:21), where we would see our children die and our own lives suffer at the hands of God’s judgment?

Dear friend, only the pretribulational teaching of Christ's coming, prior to the judgment of the Tribulation Period, gives believers this true sense of blessed hope, which is connected with the imminent return of Christ. It is the hope of rescue and redemption before the dark hour that is going to fall upon planet earth. It is the happy hope of being "caught up" into God's presence "to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17) and experience rescue from judgment and a glorious reunion with the Lord and our loved ones.

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 reveals:

"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."

This is a key Rapture passage. Paul indicates that many believers in Christ will be alive and survive until the coming of Christ. This is another reason why the Rapture cannot take place during the Tribulation Period. How could believers find hope (happy expectation) in an event that occurs during the Tribulation Period, when many Christians will die and be martyred for their faith (Rev. 20:4), when most Christians will not be living, since they will be destroyed by the hands of the Antichrist (Rev. 7:9-16)?

It's interesting that Paul clearly indicates that many believers will be living when Christ returns in the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51). How could we find comfort in the Lord's return if we knew that He could not return until the Tribulation Period begins when God's own judgment will be poured out upon the world scene (Rev. 6)? My hope and comfort is not found in facing God's judgment during the Tribulation Period or to be running from the Antichrist and His regime. My hope is in the imminent return of Christ and the comfort of knowing that I will meet the Lord in the air before the coming night of His judgment. My hope is to possess the assurance that I will be alive when Jesus returns and will be part of that generation of believers which goes without dying and who will be able to meet their loved ones in the air.

"O joy! O delight! Should we go without dying!
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no crying.
Caught up thru the clouds with our Lord into glory,
When Jesus receives His own.

Oh Lord Jesus, how long, how long
Ere we shout the glad song,
Christ returneth! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Amen, Hallelujah! Amen.”

Not long ago my wife was making a roast in the crock-pot. The smell of that roast was in the house all day long. I could almost taste that roast in the air. I was thoroughly anticipating the evening meal when I could sink my teeth into that pot roast. In a similar way we need to be anticipating and looking forward to the Lord’s imminent return. In one sense, we should be able to smell His coming, believing that it is not far a way and could happen at any moment. Old Andrew Telford used to say, “It can’t be long. It may be today!” This gives us the sense of imminency connected with the blessed hope.

2. Wait

1 Thessalonians 1:3

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”

Here we see that the imminent return of the Lord Jesus is the Christian’s blessed hope. Their waiting is said to be “their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 3) since they knew that Jesus would return and rescue them from all of their hardships and give them rescue from the coming Tribulation Period and final redemption from all of their earthly trials.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 states the glorious prospect in this way:

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

Paul did not say that the saints must wait for the Antichrist. Nor did Paul say they must wait for certain Scriptures to be fulfilled before Jesus can return. Rather, the saints were to be waiting for the true Christ to appear in the heavens at any moment and take them home to be with Him. The word “wait” denotes imminency. W. E. Vine says

that the “word carries with it the suggestion of waiting with patience and confident expectancy.” Paul had taught these saints that Jesus could return at any moment. The word “wait” implies the possibility of Christ’s coming during their lifetime, in fact, at any moment during their lifetime. The tense and sense of this word means that the saints were “to keep on waiting” for the Lord Jesus to return.

The word “wrath” in verse 10 is referring to a specific future time of God’s wrath since the definite article precedes this word in the Greek language (“the wrath to come”). It is the wrath of the Tribulation Period that Paul is referring to and alludes to once again in 1 Thessalonians 5:9. This “wrath” is placed in the same context with Christ’s coming and sets it off as God’s future or eschatological wrath of the Tribulation Period. The blessed hope is that all believers will be delivered from the coming period of judgment when the wrath of God will be poured out on the world that has rejected His Son. This period is known as the Tribulation and the time of Jacob’s Trouble (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:4–28; 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; Rev. 6:1–19:10).

Paul concluded that the believers were “delivered” (vs. 10) from this time of wrath through the continuing work of Jesus Christ. This word carries with it the idea of rescuing from something by a forcible act and indicates how the Rapture will rescue God’s children from this world before the Tribulation Period begins. Paul uses the present participle for this verb, which emphasizes Jesus’ ongoing office and work as our Deliverer.

In one sense, our rescue began when the death and resurrection obtained our deliverance and continues on into the future. Therefore, this promised deliverance from the future Tribulation Period, which is based upon the continuing work of Jesus Christ, should never cease to be an ever-present reality and glorious prospect in their hearts and lives. This text promises that Christ will return and deliver the saints “from” (Gk. – “ek” – out from) the coming time of wrath. This Greek preposition is used in Revelation 3:10 where the same promise is also given about rapture and rescue from planet earth before the Tribulation Period begins.

Revelation 3:10 says:

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

Once again, we see the Greek preposition “from” (ek) which does not mean through as mid-tribulationists and post-tribulationists have asserted. Rather the literal meaning of the preposition means “out of” or “away from.” Jesus is going to return in the Rapture and completely take us “out of” and “away from” and “from” the time of judgment. There can be no doubt about it. These saints knew that Jesus could return at any moment and that they would be rescued from this specific time of future judgment upon planet earth. This was the blessed hope and “patience of hope” (1 Thess. 1:3) that they possessed as they lived and waited for Christ’s Return.

Here is a little outline I stumbled across that summarizes 1 Thessalonians 1:10 in a clear fashion.

1. The Person - His Son
2. The Place - from heaven
3. The Pledge - whom He raised from the dead
4. The Precious Name - even Jesus
5. The Prospect - who delivered us from the wrath to come

Another “waiting” verse that tells the story of the saint’s belief in the imminent coming of Christ is 1 Corinthians 1:7: “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Corinthian believers were also taught by Paul to expect Christ to return at any moment and receive them unto Himself. This is why these saints, like the Thessalonians, were “waiting” for the Rapture to take place at any moment. These believers were anticipating the coming of the Savior. They were not waiting for the signs that would appear during the Day of the Lord or this Tribulation Period of God’s wrath. They were waiting for the Lord to return knowing that He would rescue them from all of the future signs and dreadful events which would take place upon planet earth during the Tribulation.

Galatians 5:5 says:

“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

God’s children are to possess “the hope” as they wait for the time when the Lord will come, when they will receive a glorified body, and when they will sin no more. This verse is not teaching that the Christian hopes for righteousness in connection with Christ’s present saving work, since each believer already possesses a righteous standing before God through the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). This verse is teaching that the believer waits for the moment when he will be completely righteous in himself (state of being) or in the way that he lives and conducts himself (1 John 3:2).

To “wait for the hope of righteousness” means to anticipate the any moment return of Jesus, which will result in the believer’s final salvation (glorification) – Rom. 8:30; 1 Pet. 1:9. This will be a time when the believer receives a perfect state of righteousness and will no longer be tempted to sin or disobey God in any way. What a blessed hope this is. It is an optimistic hope knowing that at any moment Jesus might break through the blue and grant us our final redemption.

Two frogs fell into a deep cream bowl,
One was an optimistic soul
But the other took the gloomy view,
"I shall drown" he cried, "and so will you."
So with a last despairing cry,
He closed his eyes and said, "Good-bye."
But the other frog, with a merry grin,
Said, "I can't get out, but I won't give in!
I'll swim around till my strength is spent.
For having tried, I'll die content."
Bravely he swam until it would seem
His struggles began to churn the cream.
On the top of the butter at last he stopped
And out of the bowl he happily hopped.
What is the moral? It's easily found.
If you can't get out--keep swimming around!

We might chuckle at this little poem. But this is hope with optimism. It's the kind of hope that we can have, as believers, while waiting for the any moment return of Jesus Christ.

3. Maranatha

1 Corinthians 16:22 reads:

“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.”

Paul concludes his first letter to the Corinthians with the word “Maranatha.” This word is of great interest and importance. The term is actually made up of three Aramaic words, which when put together, mean, “Our Lord, come.” This expression was similar to another one that we will investigate later – “The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). This Aramaic word was untranslated by the Greek speaking Christians so that they might keep it as a special secretive word known only among believers.

This “Maranatha” saying had become like a watchword and password among the early Christian believers. It was a well-known word in the early Christian community. They would speak to others and whisper it to others. It was a language that the unbelievers could not understand. But this untranslated Aramaic word was a fixed usage among the saints and gave witness to the fact of their strong belief in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The early Christians petitioned the Lord in a way that implied He could return at any moment – “Maranatha - Our Lord, cometh!” This is a word of imminency that allows believers to possess in their own hearts the happy hope of Christ's any moment return. It is an expression that points to the absolute confidence that early believers had in the imminent coming of Jesus Christ.

4. At hand

Philippians 4:5 says:

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.”

Gentleness suggests how believers are to possess a patient, nonretaliatory spirit toward all people. The way we react to others,

whether in gentleness or harshness, will be noticed by people. Why should we be gentle? Because the Lord is near. This obviously refers to the Rapture, not to His spiritual presence with the Church at all times. The context is talking about reward associated with Christ's coming (vs. 1) and is suggesting that believers should shape up in light of Christ's return. Our lives should be in order in light of Christ's return, which could occur at any moment. If some event were "at hand" this would mean that the particular event is impending or could happen at any moment. The return of Jesus Christ is "at hand" because He could come at any moment. Alfred plumber said this about the early Christians who were living in light of the coming of Christ: "at any moment they may have to answer for their conduct." We must be ready, watching, working and living in a godly fashion since "the Lord is at hand."

Revelation 1:3 also says:

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

John is saying that the "time is at hand" when Jesus will return and when the fulfillment of these prophecies will take place. In view of this, there should be a desire to hear and study the prophetic teachings in the book of Revelation. In view of Christ's imminent return and the subsequent unfolding of all these prophecies there should be an interest in how God's future plan for planet earth will be brought to fruition and finalized. Jesus could return at any moment. Because of this possibility believers are exhorted to study His Word and see what God has in store for planet earth following His return.

5. Draweth nigh

James 5:7-9 comes to the same conclusion that the return of Jesus is imminent: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."

The fact that James was writing to brethren would indicate that he was not referring to Christ's coming to judge the unbelieving Jewish nation in A.D. 70 as preterists attempt to teach. Rather, this coming is another reference to the Rapture when Jesus will return to catch away His beloved Bride. The fact that His coming "draweth nigh" indicates imminency. Both Greek verbs translated "draweth nigh" (vs. 7 – "has drawn near") and "standeth" (vs. 9 - "has taken a stand"), which are used in relationship to Christ's coming, are in the perfect tense, which indicates action already completed.

This means that each of these verbs refers to an action that is already completed and which out of necessity took place even before James wrote his epistle. But it also emphasizes the continuing results of the completed action. In other words, the completed action continues to exist at the present time. These verbs stress imminency. The sense of meaning seems to be this. Ever since the period of the last days (2 Tim. 3:1) began the probability of Christ's return went into motion and now the coming of Christ has become an imminent event that could occur at any moment.

In other words, the possibility of Christ's return began with His ascension back into glory (John 17:5). This is when the probability and plausibility of Christ's return went into motion. The pendulum began to move and the coming of Christ became an imminent event waiting to take place. Jesus will come again in the Rapture as was promised while He was here upon earth (John 14:3 – "I will come again") and He may come at any moment. This is because we are living in the era of imminency, when the truth about His Return has been finalized, and when this actual event of Christ's imminent coming has been put into action.

The imminent coming of Christ is an event that had already been in place prior to James' writing and the possibility of its actual fulfillment continued to be in existence in his own day and even into our own present generation or time. The event of Christ's return "draweth nigh" or continues to be an event that could take place at any moment. It makes good Biblical sense to say that Jesus may come today! The early believers lived with a sense of eschatological expectation.

Spiros Zodhiates said:

“Our hearts will be propped up if we live in the constant expectation of His coming.”

James shares with us as fellow believers that the blessed hope of Christ’s any moment return provides us with spiritual strength to face the hardships and trials of life. The hope of Christ’s coming should strengthen our hearts (“stablish your hearts” – James 5:8). As we look and long for His imminent return our hearts should be strengthened knowing that Jesus could return at any moment and give to us final release from all of our trials and turmoil that we face in life. Paul is saying that the very thought of Christ’s imminent return should strengthen and steady us to meet, in triumph, the sorest trials that life has to offer.

The hope of our release from all trials and persecutions offers endurance and strength for the present journey in life. We can live with the hope and expectancy that Jesus could return at any moment and bring us into the place of blessing where we will experience no more trials and tribulation. This helps us to endure trials and keep an eternal perspective on our present difficulties.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Our redemption may be just around the corner! Jesus may come today! And this provides me with daily strength as I face manifold trials and difficulties in life. We are waiting for “the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). Jesus could return at any moment and bring us into our glorified state. This helps each one of us to keep an eternal perspective and outlook on all of our present-day difficulties and hardships. It is groaning today but it may be glory tomorrow! Jesus could return today and bring us into our eternal glorified state.

The picture James paints about Jesus standing at the door (“behold, the judge standeth before the door” – James 5:9) is especially thought provoking and even heart wrenching. The Lord Jesus is pictured as standing at the door with His hand on the knob, ready to fling the door open at any moment and appear to us. What a day of reckoning it will be for His children! When James says that Christ’s coming is “before the door” it pictures imminent judgment and gives us incentive to live patiently and lovingly among God’s people. In view of Christ’s imminent return, we don’t want to be found as a lying, gossiping judge, who is constantly talking about people behind their backs and saying all kinds of evil things about them, so as to ruin their reputation, ministry and life.

James 4:11

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”

To “speak evil” of each other means to practice injurious speech that is specifically aimed at hurting the character and reputation of others. It might include false speech or lying (downright untruth) which God has clearly forbidden (Ex. 2:16). It also includes spreading gossip about the faults and sins of others, even though the information might be true. Evil speaking does not mean to contradict an opponent’s speech, what he said, his doctrinal position or the error of his way. Christians are never to relieve themselves of proper discernment and judgment.

There is a place for righteous judgment of all error, sin, worldliness and those who openly endorse these things (Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:21). However, some of the saints were continually speaking against their brothers and sisters by way of personal criticism, defaming their character and talking behind their backs. This is the well-known church gossip and slanderer who seems to be constantly nitpicking and finding fault with every individual and who lets everybody else know about the faults of those people.

A person who practices this type of judgment is actually judging the Old Testament Law that forbids slander and an unloving spirit toward

brothers (Lev. 19:6-8). Of course, they are also judging the royal law of love, which James already addressed (James 2:8). Instead of fulfilling this law they actually become a judge against it. The disobedient believer removes himself from the company of Christians who are a “doer” of the law of love and he now becomes a judge of it (James 4:11), since he seeks to break it deliberately and treat it with disrespect. It is the same as saying that the law is not good, and not worthy of obedience.

The individual who practices speaking evil against his brothers and sisters is the type of person who has a bitter and critical spirit and who is continually criticizing others. It's the person who is waiting to find out some new information on a person so that they can speak to others about it! It's the hypocritical judge that Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry who sets out to criticize everyone else while at the same time he has a truckload of sin in his own heart (Matt. 7:1-5). It's also a type of judgment that has no Biblical base. Instead, it is rooted in legalism. This kind of judgment is always wrong and those who are practicing it will be ashamed of their own personal lives when Jesus returns (1 John 2:28).

In addition, we don't want to “grudge” (lit. – “groan or sigh” – James 5:9) with bitterness, anger, criticism and complaining against our brothers and sisters because of what they have done against us or whatever they are presently doing that bothers us. This is because we don't want to stand before our Judge with bitterness and anger in our hearts toward other saints. The Judge will even be able to detect the inward groaning of bitterness and anger that does not manifest itself outwardly. At any moment we might be summoned up into the heavens and stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of our entire lives, as believers, and the way we were living when Jesus returned.

Second Corinthians 5:10 informs us that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Because of this solemn occasion, we should not judge in an unrighteous manner lest we be judged. In other words, our unrighteous, nit-picking, faultfinding, judgmental, gossiping, slanderous spirit toward others, which is designed to tear people apart, defame their character and bring shame upon them, is absolutely inexcusable in God's sight (James 4:11). Furthermore, we

should not let resentment build up in our hearts and “grudge” (moan) against other believers with these kinds of attitudes lest we find ourselves being judged of an unworthy lifestyle and soiled heart when Jesus returns.

In view of the hope of Christ’s soon return, believers should cease their petty conflicts with others and stop harboring bitterness in their hearts toward others and speaking evil of others. As children in a school classroom look out for their teacher’s soon return, God’s children should be prepared for Christ’s return when we face our Judge (“behold, the judge standeth before the door”).

I recall talking with one of my old schoolteachers. He used to have one large, combined class of 64 young people. He shared with me how years ago, when he was walking back toward the classroom, he could hear the young people saying, “He’s coming” and “Here he comes.” And when he finally got back into the room someone had broken a particular item in the classroom. When he asked who did it, none of them spoke up. Since all of them stood up for the person who broke the item, he decided to teach them a lesson and spank all 64 young people for being partners in the crime. He personally told me that in those old days, before lawsuits and disrespect for authority, that he lined them all up and paddled every last one of them with one good whack!

May I ask you something very personal today? If Jesus were to come this week or even tonight, before you place your head upon your pillow, would your life be in order? Don’t fool yourself since everything is going to be laid out in the open at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You can fool some of the people, but you can’t fool the Judge!

There was a little girl in a certain home. She was too young to tell time. But in the evening she seemed to know that it was time for her daddy to come home. She would begin to look out the window and listen at the door. Soon she would see him coming. The door would open and she would leap into his arms. In a similar way, we are to be looking and listening for the Lord. His coming may be near and we must have our lives in order. The judge is standing before the door.

1 Corinthians 4:5

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”

We will not be judged for our sins, but our life will be examined for service and overall obedience and dedication to the Lord. Have you been a submissive wife? Have you been a spiritual husband and father? Have you been faithful to what you know God wants you to do? Are you running from what God wants you to do? Are you disobedient to truth, which you know you should embrace? Have you been compromising with known sin and uncleanness? Are you condoning sin in some way? Are you gossiping about others behind their back? Are you living your own life and lie and doing your own thing? Is your life surrendered to God? Is your on the altar of sacrifice laid? Does your heart the Spirit control?

1 Peter 4:7 says:

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”

Jesus is coming! His is coming down the hallway. His hand is on the doorknob. He’s turning the doorknob.

“Faithful and true would He find us here
If He should come today?
Watch for that time is drawing near.
What if it were today?”

6. Quickly

Revelation 3:11

“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Revelation 22:7

“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

Revelation 22:12

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

Revelation 22:20 also states:

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

All of these verses use the word “quickly” (takhoo) which means “without delay” and denotes to come in a sudden manner. This is the promise of Christ to the Church today. Jesus will return quickly or suddenly without any delay. J. Barton Payne suggests that the word “quickly” (takhoo) means, “Not soon but swiftly, all at once, that is before one can be aware and make preparations.” This word clearly denotes imminency and cannot be restated to mean otherwise. The possibility of the Lord’s sudden return and appearance was always present. It is no different today. Jesus could come suddenly and without delay. He could break into human history at any moment and interrupt the plans of mankind and take His children home to be with Himself as promised (John 14:1-2). Leon Morris comments on the use of the word “quickly” and Christ’s return in Revelation 22 when saying, “The imminence of the coming is repeated.”

John Walvoord comments on the word “quickly” when saying: “The thought seems to be that when the action comes, it will be sudden. Also, it is to be regarded as impending as if it is meant to be fulfilled at any time.” There is a real sense of urgency throughout the book of Revelation concerning the any moment return of the Lord. We should expect Him at any moment and get our life in order in view of His return and our subsequent reward (Rev. 22:12). John MacArthur Jr. concludes by saying: “A natural reading of the New Testament yields the truth that to the early church Jesus’ coming was imminent; that is, that it could happen at any time. They believed that He could come back for them in their lifetime ... Not knowing when He might return, they wisely lived prepared for and hoping for Jesus to return at any moment.”

The word “surely” (Rev. 22:20) is also used to denote the solemn assurance that Jesus may come at any moment. The imminent hope of Christ’s return filled the hearts of the early Christians. There was a

ray of sunshine in their hearts as they realized that Jesus might return quickly or swiftly, in a sudden manner, without any warning or delay. This kept their eyes to the sky and their hope steadfast.

Hebrews 10:37 says:

“For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

This verse also reminds us of the speedy and swift return of Jesus Christ in the Rapture. The fact that Jesus “will not tarry” or delay His return denotes imminency. Many times, we have heard well-meaning believers use the expression, “We will meet again if the Lord tarries.” Well, the Lord will not tarry! When He decides to return, He will do so without delay. He will swiftly, speedily and suddenly return without any warning. His coming is imminent and could take place at any moment.

Some folks act as though He keeps putting off His coming, that He is tarrying. But Jesus is not going to tarry. It is on His calendar to come. Somebody might ask, “When is He coming?” Well, the Lord won’t let any believer see His calendar, so no believer knows when Jesus is going to come. This is why we cannot set any dates for the Lord’s coming. Nobody knows when He is coming. But we do know that His coming is an imminent or impending event. It could take place at any moment. The Lord will not dilly-dally around when He decides to break through the blue. He will not delay His return. He will not tarry.

7. Come

Revelation 22:20

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

This is Christ’s promise to us that He could come at any moment and take us home to be with Him (John 14:1-3). It’s also true that each believer today can express faith in the promise that Jesus will return in the Rapture by saying with the apostle John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (vs. 22). This has been the beseeching prayer echoed on the lips of countless numbers of Christians throughout the centuries of time. And believer’s, who have the blessed hope abiding in their

hearts, will continue to echo this prayer until the very moment that Jesus does return. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” This is a prayer of imminency. It is a prayer that longs for the sudden arrival of the glorified Christ from Heaven. And each believer can say, “Amen” to this prayer knowing that it is true. Jesus may come today!

8. Nearer

Romans 13:11

“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.”

One might wonder how our salvation can be nearer than when we first believed on Christ for salvation. Wasn't the believer saved when he believed on Christ? Of course, we were already saved in the past (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9). What this text is referring to is our future salvation and final redemption, our blessed hope, when we will receive a new glorified, painless and sinless body. There is a future tense attached to our salvation.

1 Peter 1:9

“Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

The fact that our future and final salvation is nearer than when we first believed and were saved is a strong argument for imminency. This means that Christ could return at any moment and bring each believer into their final state of blessing. What a hope and anticipation we have as believers. The completion of our salvation, the deliverance of our body, where we will experience complete freedom from every bodily trial and testing, may shortly come to pass. In fact, it may happen today. Glory, glory, Jesus may come today!

9. Twinkling of an eye

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 states the prophecy:

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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.”

This expression not only speaks of how the Rapture will take place but also points to the suddenness and unexpected nature of the event. It could take place in the twinkling of an eye. When we twinkle or flicker our eyelids we do so without planning or thinking. It is something we do suddenly and automatically. This is the way the Rapture will take place (without warning or planning) and how it will occur (with great speed) when Jesus returns. It will be an event that occurs without warning and with lightning like speed we will be changed. Jesus may come at any moment and in the twinkling of an eye we would be transformed and transported into the air to meet the Lord.

Dear friend, it could happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! Can you even imagine it? How glorious it will be when in that flashing of the eyelid we will be found changed and standing in front of our Savior. What a hope! What a blessed hope! This is the blessed hope! One moment we will be enduring the pain and suffering attached to this earthly life, the next moment rising to meet the Lord. Like a flash of lightening shooting across the sky will be the speed of our deliverance and final redemption. In the twinkling of an eye!

Harry Ironside said:

“What a marvelous hope it is! No wonder the apostle calls it the blessed hope.”

10. When he shall appear

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.”

1 John 3:2

“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.”

Colossians 3:4

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

We see by this repeated statement that the early church was looking for His appearance even though they did not know when it would occur. Nevertheless, the early Christians knew that Jesus would appear swiftly and suddenly in the Rapture. His appearance, though not known, was looked upon as an imminent event ready to occur. The question for the early Christians was not “if” He will appear but “when” would be the moment that He finally comes. They had the blessed hope fixed upon their hearts and they longed for the moment when Jesus would finally return.

It is difficult to get around the conclusion that Jesus could return at any moment and that the early Church really did anticipate the Lord’s return at any moment. The Scriptural evidence is overwhelming. The coming of Christ was just as imminent in the first century as it is today. Christ could have returned in the apostolic generation and He could come today. These key terms and phrases, when understood in their normal sense, teach the imminency of Christ’s return and give to us the blessed hope in our hearts today. The promises are so worded that in every age the Church can be looking for Christ’s return.

Gerald B. Stanton wrote:

“There is not a little wrong with any system of interpretation which destroys the force of exhortations such as these, painting over the bright hues of the hope of an imminent return of Christ with the somber shades of impending Tribulation.”

Proverbs 13:12 says this about hope:

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.”

Believers can have the blessed hope abiding in their hearts knowing that Jesus will return at any moment to rescue them from all worldly trial and testing, including the final future Tribulation Period, which is going to be unleashed upon the world. The blessed hope connected with Christ’s imminent return is not a “deferred hope” which means a hope that is delayed and which will not come to pass. Rather, it is a happy hope or confident expectancy that Jesus will return at any moment and bring believers true release from all earthly trial and judgment. It’s the hope or rescue from all harm, trial, pain, suffering

and judgment. This is why it is called a blessed or happy hope. And like all forms of hope, it becomes “a tree life” to us or a blessing to our lives that sustains us spiritually through life’s difficult journey.

Hope that is lost can make us bitter but hope that is flourishing in our hearts is like a wish come true and it becomes a great blessing to our lives and form of spiritual vitality and sustenance. Oh my friend, the blessed hope, which is connected with Christ’s imminent return, does not convey any thought that we will experience wrath, turmoil, pain and earthly testing. Rather, the blessed hope conveys the confident expectancy in our hearts that we will forever experience exemption and redemption from all worldly foes, failures and earthly fates. The blessed hope of Christ’s coming is the release from all these earthly trials including the judgment of God’s wrath during the seven years of tribulation upon planet earth.

Rebuttals of the Blessed Hope

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that the early church believed in an imminent return of Christ, various objections or rebuttals are given by opponents of the blessed hope. They are arguments which try to disprove that Jesus could return at any moment. In other words, those who do not believe in imminence will use various arguments to try and disprove the any-moment return of Christ and steal the true hope of Christ’s return from our hearts. They object to imminence in order to substantiate their beliefs in a mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation Rapture.

Argument #1

One objection or argument to an imminent return of Christ claims that the post-apostolic church did not believe in the imminency of Christ’s return. This is simply a false conclusion. Without going into great detail one can easily gather facts together concerning the writings of many early church leaders. We read in the First Epistle of Clement, written about A.D. 96, “Of truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, Speedily will He come, and will not tarry.” In the Epistle of Barnabas, “The Lord has cut short the times and the days that His Beloved, may hasten.” He also said, “The Lord is near, and His reward.” Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, refers to “the last times” and exhorts in those times to

“expect Him.” Clement of Rome preached the coming of Christ, and expressed the hope “that He shall come quickly and not tarry.” The early Church Fathers lived in expectancy of our Lord’s speedy return.

Church leaders down through the centuries have expressed their hope in the imminent return of Christ. Even John Wesley (1703 – 91), whose postmillennial eschatology was different than ours, still believed in an imminent arrival of Christ. He was not waiting to pass through seven years of the Tribulation Period. He wrote those lovely words:

“Perhaps He will appear as the dayspring from on high,
Before the morning light. Oh, do not set a time –
Expect Him every hour, Now He is nigh, even at the doors.”

Martin Luther said:

“...let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer’s coming with longing and cheerful mind.”

John Calvin wrote:

“Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation for the advent of Christ.”

The early church fathers and reformers did not teach all the details of God’s eschatological program. However, it is important to see that they believed in an imminent return of Christ. It’s unorthodox to reject the any moment return of Christ and only claim that it is a 19th century phenomenon. The early church and post-apostolic church as well as the church down through the centuries have always understood that Christ might return at any moment. This has been a commonly understood, accepted and proclaimed truth throughout the history of the Church because the Bible clearly teaches the imminency of Christ’s return.

Argument #2

Another argument concludes that Christ could not return because the Gospel had to be preached throughout the entire world before He could return (Acts 1:8). In the first place, Jesus did not say that every person in the world must hear the Gospel or be reached by the

Gospel before Jesus can return in the Rapture, unlike His Second Coming when the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to all the world (Matt. 24:14). This was simply a statement of God's choice, mind and heart in connection with the Gospel proclamation.

Jesus was not establishing an exact program and requirement that must come to fruition before He can return. Secondly, Jesus did not say in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature and then I will return again." This is obviously reading into Christ's statement. Christ's return is not conditioned upon the disciple's orders to carry out the Great Commission. Christ gave this order of evangelization without any preconceived requirements that had to be met before He could return. In fact, Paul concludes by saying that the Gospel had gone out into the known Roman world of his day (Col. 1:6, 23). In light of the overwhelming success of the spread of the Gospel there is absolutely no indication that the Great Commission was a barrier to the imminent return of Christ.

Argument #3

Another argument revolves around the deaths of Peter, Paul, and the rumor about John being alive at Christ's coming. Some suggest that Christ's coming is not imminent since Peter's death was foretold and had to occur before Jesus could return (John 21:18-19). This is an old argument from Robert Cameron in his book entitled, "Scripture Truth About the Lord's Return" (1922). It's assumed that this destroys immanency. But does it really? Was Jesus saying that the Rapture would not occur before Peter died? Paul wrote before Peter's death and believed that the Lord could return for the church at any moment (1 Thess. 4:16-18; 2 Thess. 2:1). Even Peter wrote in this manner (2 Pet. 3:3-5). It is probable that we should understand references to future events, such as Peter's death, as being contingent on the larger purposes of God, including the Rapture.

Paul was also informed about some particular future events that he must pass through (Acts 23:11; 27:24), even his own death ("after my departure" - Acts 20:29-30). However, Paul fully expected Jesus to return at any moment (Phil. 3:20-21). This is because Paul and the other early Christians believed in the imminent return of Christ. Nothing had to occur before His return. The future events foretold to

come to pass in connection with Peter or Paul's lives was conditioned upon one thing: if the Lord did not return before then! We often speak this way today. We say something will happen, but we mean unless the Lord comes first. You will grow old, if it's Lord's will, and the Lord does not come back.

Sometimes God can declare that something will take place while at the same time interrupt those plans by other overriding circumstances and events. Such was the case with Jonah and Nineveh (Jonah 3). God said that He would destroy Nineveh, but God altered His plans in accordance with the repentant hearts of the people and did not destroy the city until some 100 years later. God allowed the human element to enter into the picture. The same is true in the case with King Ahaz. God had declared that Ahaz was going to die but at the same time He allowed the human element of prayer to enter into the picture and alter His previous plans for Ahaz (2 Kings 20:1-8).

This same principle should be applied to Peter or Paul's death and the imminence of the Rapture. God has chosen to work out His decree for the Rapture in a prophetic program revolving around imminence. This means that God's originally stated plans for the deaths of both Paul and Peter could potentially be interrupted by His overriding plans for the Rapture. We know that God can alter His original statements and plans in light of the much broader picture and scope of His purposes. This can also be proven from numerous Bible texts that speak about the Lord repenting or changing His mind (Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:35; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19). It would seem that God does at times alter His previous plans. This is done within the scope of His own divine decrees. This does not limit God's sovereignty; it adds to God's sovereignty and wisdom.

It's interesting that Peter himself believed that he was living in the "last days" (2 Pet. 3:3) which were connected with the imminent coming of Christ and says that scoffers of the coming of Christ would be "willingly ignorant" about Christ's return (2 Pet. 3:3-5). Peter also knew that he might die suddenly because of his older age (2 Peter 1:14). But at the same time, he never lost sight of Christ's imminent return (1 Pet. 4:7 – "the end of all things is at hand"). In short, it's inconceivable to believe that the early church, who was looking and waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to return from heaven (1 Thess.

1:10), would run around and ask each other the question, “Is Peter dead yet?”

Argument #4

Connected to this same Peter passage is another argument that is posed in order to reject an imminent and pretribulational Rapture return. This argument claims that there was a first century Rapture error. The thesis of this argument goes something like this. It was possible for erroneous ideas about a pretribulation Rapture to creep into the Church very early in its history, even during the lifetime of the apostles. In John 21 we find an example of how erroneous doctrines could prevail where certain disciples taught John would be alive at Christ’s coming. In a similar way, the idea of a pretribulational Rapture is another erroneous and false teaching that was eventually propagated by the Church.

John 21:21-23 states:

“Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple (John) should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will (desire) that he tarry (remain on earth) till I come, what is that to thee?”

In verses 18-19 the Lord Jesus told Peter about his death, which would take place when Peter was “old.” Peter then sees John (verses 20-21) and asks the Lord what will happen to his beloved friend. Jesus taught Peter that he should not worry about John’s life but fulfill his own duty and destiny. As a result of the conversation between Christ and Peter, it began to be circulated, by a number of the disciples or followers of Christ, that John would not die (would not see physical death) before Jesus returns. This was based upon a misunderstanding of Christ’s words which were spoken to Peter. It was being taught that John would remain alive until the coming of the Lord Jesus. The fact of the matter is this; Jesus did not state if John would be alive or dead at His coming. He simply said that this is a matter of God’s will and is something that Peter should not be worried about.

George Zeller explains it like this:

“What did the Lord Jesus actually say? What was the exact meaning of His words? It was this: John MIGHT NOT die. Jesus said, ‘If.’ The rapture may or may not have come in John’s lifetime, and now, from our perspective, we know that it did not come in John’s lifetime. In saying what He said our Lord presented the doctrine of imminency (He might come even in John’s lifetime), but He did not give any grounds for setting dates (He did not say that He had to come by a certain time or before a certain event). He did not teach that He would come before John died, but only that He might come.”

It’s interesting that John was given the privilege to write the Revelation of Jesus Christ which clearly taught an imminent return of Christ in the Rapture (Rev. 1:3; 22:17-20). John did not fall for this errant teaching but corrected it in his own writings.

The general observation is made by those who oppose imminency that this saying about John involved erroneous doctrine in connection with Christ’s return and opens the possibility for other errors to be circulated concerning Christ’s return, such as the teaching about the Rapture of the church occurring before the Tribulation Period. Of course, this is a straw man argument built upon speculation.

It is true that what the people were saying and teaching about John being alive at the Lord’s coming was not accurate and turned out to be absolutely false. This erroneous doctrine and rumor was spread abroad and propagated during the early days of the Church. It had become a common saying and misconception among the brethren. But since this error was propagated, which revolves around Christ’s coming, those who oppose the imminent return and Rapture of the Church before the Tribulation Period will sometimes conclude that the Rapture was also another false teaching spread throughout the early days of the apostolic church. It is believed that the Rapture is an erroneous doctrine that was formed when the original followers of Christ misunderstood and misinterpreted what Jesus actually taught. What many have said about the Rapture contains the orthodox truth about Christ’s return but it was not the exact truth that Jesus taught about His return.

Let's respond to this argument.

First, this argument is pure conjecture. It's based upon speculation and not facts. There is nothing found in Scripture which signifies the early church was confused on the teaching regarding Christ's imminent return. Just the opposite is true. The doctrine of imminency was clearly taught regarding Christ's return (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Phil. 4:5; James 5:7-9; Rom. 13:11; Rev. 22:17; Col. 3:4) and is part of the inspired record of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not a misunderstood and misguided teaching of the early church.

Second, it's interesting to first observe that John in his gospel corrected this error about himself (John 21:23), even though it would have been to his advantage, if what they were saying had been true (he would not have died!). This tells us that he did not accept this teaching as being genuine and from the lips of the Lord. Furthermore, following John's conclusion, this errant teaching did not continue to circulate throughout the future church centuries.

Third, it's also interesting that the error was not far from the truth because what they were saying could have happened (Christ could have come before John died!). The Christians certainly believed this. Likewise, it's a glorious and clear fact of Scripture that there will be a whole generation of believers that will not see physical death because Christ will come for them before they die (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Fourth, the Scriptures repeatedly tell us that the early Church was looking and waiting for the Son's return from Heaven (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20) and they would be raptured before the Tribulation Period (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:1-10; Rev. 3:10). This is no hoax or rumor! These verses are the direct result of God's promise given to the apostolic Church. To argue otherwise is to question the Scriptural revelation and authority of God's truth.

Fifth, the whole premise that the apostolic Church embraced error in relationship to the timing of Christ's coming in the Rapture is clearly revealed in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. However, Paul in this passage clearly defines the real error of timing, which dealt with placing the event of the Rapture during the seven-year Tribulation Period of

coming judgment, when the Antichrist would be living in the world and practicing his godless works. The error did not deal with placing the Rapture before this coming time of judgment but placing the occurrence of this event during this period of time.

Sixth, the error that some early disciples circulated was minor when compared to the serious doctrinal, eschatological, and blatant errors that were to come later such as the Church has replaced Israel in God's program, there is no literal earthly kingdom, baptismal regeneration, papal authority, etc.). God's discerning people know that there have been many errors propagated throughout church history, but the final analysis must be this: "What saith the scripture? (Romans 4:3).

Argument #5

In Matthew 24:1-3 Jesus predicted that the fall of Jerusalem would take place. This historically occurred in A.D. 70. Therefore, Christ could not have returned before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Proper exegesis does not warrant this conclusion. In the first place, this prophecy has nothing to do with the Church and the promise of the Rapture. This prophecy focuses on national Israel and her future – not the future of the Church. Once again, this prophecy would be contingent upon the prophecy and promise of an imminent return of Christ which fulfills God's greater purpose (1 Cor. 16:22).

We must once again contemplate how God sometimes declares that an event will transpire or take place but at the same time interrupt His plans by other overriding circumstances and events (Jonah 3, 2 Kings 20:1-8, Ex. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:35; 1 Chron. 21:15; Jer. 26:19). Scripture repeatedly tells us that God can change His foreseen plans and interrupt these plans with other circumstances and events, which are interwoven into His own providential workings. In other words, Jesus could have still returned even though this event was already planned in the sovereign purpose of God.

Another important detail about the A.D. 70 Roman judgment on Jerusalem is that such an event as this could conceivably occur in the time period between the Rapture and the commencement of the Tribulation Period. We must remember that there is an unknown

duration of time between the Rapture and the Antichrist's signing of the covenant with the nation of Israel, which will last for the week of seven years (Dan. 9:27). Thus, a period of time between these two events, the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation Period, would allow for some flexibility for such an event like this to occur.

In other words, there is no reason to use arguments that destroy the clear teaching of Christ's imminent return. This is because an event such as this could conceivably take place after the Rapture and prior to the commencement of the Tribulation Period, if God had planned it this way in His providential workings. In short, the time span of about thirty-seven years, which existed between this prophecy and Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans, does not destroy imminence, since this prophecy could also be fulfilled after the Rapture.

Argument #6

Since the Antichrist is going to make a covenant with the Jews for seven years during the Tribulation Period (Dan. 9:27) and since no Jewish nation existed until 1948, the possibility for an imminent Rapture did not exist until the nation of Israel was born in 1948. This may sound convincing on the surface but is really another argument that has a hole in its bucket. We must remember that Daniel's prophecy deals with the Tribulation Period and has no bearing on events that MUST occur before the Rapture can take place. Since the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation Period, any events dealing with the Tribulation Period have absolutely no bearing on the timing of the Rapture.

In other words, the people of Israel could have just as easily been united together as a nation after the Rapture when all these actual events are scheduled to take place. In fact, as mentioned in the above argument, there will obviously be a span of time that will occur between the Rapture of the Church and the signing of the covenant with the Jewish nation, which officially marks the beginning of the seven-year period (Dan. 9:27). This gives more time for certain events to unfold and pave the way for the commencement of the Tribulation Period. In actuality, the birth of the nation of Israel is something that could have occurred after the Rapture. In any event, the remarkable birth of the nation of Israel in 1948 does inform us that

the stage is being set for the final prophetic drama to begin, which is related to God's plan for the earth.

Argument #7

The argument is also given which states that the "apostasy" which was spoken about in the book of Acts and the epistles had to come to fruition or set in before Jesus could return (Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Peter 3:1-2). This is another empty argument simply because Paul, Peter, John and Jude realized and understood that they were already living in the last days even during their own lifetime (2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18; 4:3; Jude vs. 18). Paul recognized in his own time that there was evil (Eph. 5:16).

Both John and Paul understood that the departure had already begun and would continue to manifest its ugly head in the Church.

1 John 4:3

"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

2 Thessalonians 2:7

"For the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

Paul predicted that apostasy would continue to grow and expand ("wax worse and worse" – 2 Tim. 3:13) until Jesus decides to return in the Rapture; he did NOT say that apostasy MUST reach a certain level before Jesus could return in the Rapture. Let's study our Bible and stop reading things into them that are not presented in order to destroy the correct teaching regarding immanency and the Rapture.

The believers of the early Church did not wait for the "last days" prophecies to be fulfilled, at a future time, in order that Jesus could return. They knew that they were living in the commencement of this era or epoch of time when defection from truth would begin and would continue to exist until Jesus returns. Paul's prediction of future apostasy simply means that the same trends would continue until

Christ returns. Paul simply predicted what would continue to happen in the Church until Jesus returns.

Paul does make very clear that the final apostasy or total abandonment of truth will occur AFTER the Church is raptured, resulting in the harlot/apostate church remaining on earth (2 Thess. 2:3). Until then there would be a steady defection from the truth and deception would “wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). The time would come and was no doubt already present in its infant stages, in the apostle’s opinion, when men would no longer put up with the sound of healthy teaching of Scripture (2 Tim. 4:3). People would develop distaste for healthy teaching. In fact, this would continue to be a deteriorating process until Jesus returns. How worse it would get nobody could know. But hundreds of years later we are still living in the era of time known as the “last days” and continue to witness the deterioration of doctrine, the disinterest in healthy teaching and experience the “doctrines of demons” which are associated with the last days (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul said it would happen in his day and continue to spread until Jesus breaks through the blue and rescued His beloved Church.

Argument #8

Another argument that is posed as destroying imminency involves Christ’s promise to Paul to bear His name before the Gentiles, as he would travel to far away lands over a span of many years (Acts. 9:15; 22:21). This command for Paul to evangelize Gentiles presumably destroys the possibility of any imminent return. Of course, we do know that Paul completed three missionary journeys. He also planned to visit the saints at Jerusalem, Rome and journey onto Spain (Rom. 15:23-25). What do we make of these plans and Christ’s commission to Paul? Does this pose a problem to imminency? Of course not! Remember, the plan and program of God for Paul, or for any other person, is always contingent upon His greater program revolving around imminency. The fulfillment of God’s earthly plans is always contingent upon the fulfillment of God’s heavenly plans, which include an imminent arrival of His Son from Heaven. All of the plans and proposed programs for Paul were still conditioned upon the glorious truth that Christ could return at any moment.

Jesus was not establishing an exact program and requirement that must come to fruition before He could return. He is stating a general purpose that will come to pass. Furthermore, we must remember that Paul always based His future moves in accordance with God's overall will and program for his life (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; see also James 4:15) and the length of his own life (1 Cor. 15:30 - "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"). Paul served in the spirit of the exhortation, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). He knew about the Lord's plans for his earthly life but also lived in the light of Christ's heavenly plan for His imminent coming (Phil. 3:20). The promise of Christ's imminent return outshined His earthly command to be the apostle to the Gentiles. The commands associated with his earthly life did not overshadow the glorious prospect and promise of Christ's imminent return. Paul knew that God had synchronized his earthly plan with the heavenly promise!

Argument #9

Some suggest that Jesus cannot return in the Rapture until the last person that Jesus plans to save becomes a Christian. It is then taught that this factual conclusion does away with imminency. In other words, it is sometimes assumed that Jesus cannot return in the Rapture until the last person is saved that God knows will be saved. How do we deal with this kind of vain and circular reasoning? We might answer this argument in several ways.

First, God's decrees cannot be changed by individual decisions. God knows the last person who will be saved before the Rapture takes place. However, at the same time God does not base His Son's return in the Rapture on the salvation of any particular individual, since He has already determined by His own sovereign decrees, when He would return (Isa. 14:24). From God's perspective Jesus will return at an exact moment and time. However, from man's perspective His coming is imminent (any moment) since we do not know the sovereign decree when the Rapture will occur.

We must remember that the salvation of individuals do not determine the Son's return or fix the timing of the Rapture, since God has already decreed when His Son would return in the Rapture. God has

not placed any limits upon Himself in connection with His Son's return in the Rapture.

Hebrews 10:37

"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Since this is true, the Son will return in the Rapture whenever He chooses, even though it will take place after the salvation of certain individuals. Yes, it's true that God knows the last person who will be saved before the Son returns in the Rapture (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2). However, He also already the exact time when the Son is going to return in the Rapture. If He did not possess knowledge about these things, He would not be God (1 John 3:20). However, since none of us know the intricate decrees of God in relationship to His salvation program for individuals, the whole matter of Christ's return not being impending or imminent because of the future salvation of souls is futile.

Second, we must once again reiterate the difference between God's perspective and man's perspective. From God's perspective there is no imminency because He has His decrees already set and in order, even the decree concerning the Rapture and who will be the final person to be saved prior to His return. However, God has chosen to work out His decrees, in relationship to the Rapture, in a prophetic earthly program revolving around imminency. In other words, even though God knows when the last person is going to be saved, prior to His return, He has not done away with His earthly program of imminency in relationship to the Rapture. From man's vantage point Jesus could return at any moment and this is the way God has chosen to present the truth about His Son's return in the Rapture.

Think of it this way. From God's perspective, Who knows all things and decrees all things, there can be no surprises, such as Christ's sudden return in the Rapture, or who the last person will be that is saved prior to the Rapture. These are things God already knows because of His own established decrees. But from man's perspective, Christ could come at any moment (Rev. 22:10), since God has determined that nothing needs to happen before Jesus returns.

From man's perspective, not knowing the time of the Son's return, or who will be the final person that is saved before the Rapture, means that the believer can honestly "look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20) from Heaven and know that He could return at any moment. Man's perspective of the Rapture and return of Christ is imminent but from God's perspective the Rapture is already decreed and set to take place according to His perfect timetable. In relationship to man's perspective the coming of Jesus Christ could happen at any moment and nothing needs to take place before He comes, not even the salvation of certain people. This is why the coming of Christ is a blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

Argument #10

Another shallow argument is given which stresses that the early Church needed to wait for the tares to be sown among the wheat and grow up among the true harvest before Jesus could return (Matt. 13:24-30). Little comment must be made about this speculative argument simply because the eschatological time period involving the harvest in Matthew chapter thirteen involves the Lord's Second Coming to earth and not His coming in the Rapture.

Those who reject the imminent return of Christ seem to correlate the Rapture with His Second Coming to earth as mentioned in the parabolic teaching of Christ (Matt 13). This causes great confusion to God's prophetic program. Matthew thirteen actually correlates to the Judgment of the Living Nations which takes place at the close of the Tribulation Period (Matthew 25:31-46). Therefore, this sowing of the tares among the wheat in no way would hinder or prevent the Rapture from occurring since the Rapture is not in view in this parable.

It is true that the tares began to be sown among the wheat during the early days of the Church era and continues to this present hour. This is part of the "mysteries of the kingdom" that Jesus spoke about (Matt. 13:11) which refers to the sacred secrets that were unknown to Old Testament saints in relationship to the establishment of the kingdom on the earth. Jesus was teaching that there would be a mixing together of the true and the false before the kingdom would be established upon earth. Nevertheless, the coming of Christ in the

Rapture was not contingent upon the tares being sown among the wheat.

The Second Coming of Christ to earth was based upon this occurrence. The end of the mixing program and time of harvesting in this parable will occur at the end of the tribulation age (Matt. 13:39) and has no bearing on the timing of the Rapture whatsoever. Furthermore, the mixing already began to occur during the apostolic era (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4 – “false brethren”) even as the apostasy from truth began to take shape (1 John 4:3). In other words, these prophecies were already fulfilled during the apostolic church and would not negate an imminent return of Christ.

Argument #11

Some will teach that the Rapture is portrayed as an expectant event but not an imminent event. The opponents of the imminent return of Christ try to make a distinction between the terms imminent and expectant. The thrust of this argument is that the early church looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ with great expectancy but not with imminency. This allows room for pre-wrath, mid-tribulational and even post-tribulational views to be embraced. In other words, one can hold to these aberrant views or positions on the Lord’s coming by expecting Christ to return at a given point of time but not necessarily at any moment.

This argument is weak simply because the term imminent is an adjective describing the nature of an event whereas the term expectant is an adjective describing a person’s attitude toward any event. This tells us that an imminent event, such as the Rapture, can also be an expectant event in the hearts and lives of people (Rev. 22:20). There is no reason to separate these two terms and try to make an argument against imminency. The key terms and phrases connected with Christ’s coming (looking, look, waiting, wait, Maranatha, nearer, quickly) all teach about the nature of Christ’s return rather than just the believer’s attitude toward Christ’s return. The early church was not only looking forward to His return but also expecting His return at any moment (Phil. 3:20-21). The very fact that believers were called upon to keep their lives in order in view of

Christ's return (James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28) would indicate that this event was impending or imminent.

Dr. Wilbur Smith once said this about arguments attempting to discredit the imminent nature of the Rapture: "If the church is to experience the Tribulation, the idea of the imminency of Christ's appearing must be given up. I think that no man can say from the Scriptures that Christ cannot come today. And if He could return today, it is not necessary to argue that He will come at the end of the dreadful period of suffering and satanic rule."

The point is this, all these arguments are "straw man" arguments designed to protect an erroneous eschatology of the end times. The mid-tribulational view, pre-wrath tribulational view and post-tribulational view of Christ's coming destroys the blessed hope of the imminent or any moment return of Christ. There is not one ounce or drop of imminency left in these false theories and conclusions about the coming of Christ. They steal the true meaning of the blessed hope of Christ's coming away from our hearts. This is because the blessed hope is connected with the imminency of Christ's return and our subsequent redemption from our body and rescue from all earthly harm and trial – even the greatest trial that is going to "try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

I once was talking to a man who said he believed in the pan out theory of Christ's coming. I asked him, "What is the pan out theory of Christ's coming?" He quickly replied, "I believe it will all pan out in the end and whatever happens will happen." In other words, this man had no convictions on the timing of the Rapture but simply said that whatever will take place will take place and only then will we really know what the Scriptures teach. But the Bible teaches that we should possess a clear belief, conviction, and understanding about the timing of Christ's coming.

Why does it really matter? What is the significance behind the timing of the Rapture? Why shouldn't we possess a "pan out theory" attitude, toward the event of the Rapture, which assumes that we cannot know when the Rapture takes place until it actually occurs?

There are at least three reasons why:

- ✓ Because no person should steal the blessed hope from our hearts (Titus 2:13).
- ✓ Because we are not to be deceived by false teaching revolving around the coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:1-3).
- ✓ Because Christ's coming is portrayed as being imminent (1 Thess. 1:10).

The question I must leave with you today is this. Have you allowed some man with a spurious message rob you of the blessed hope that you can possess in light of Christ's imminent return? Have you lost the blessed hope of Christ's any moment return because of a faulty eschatological position? There are many who will try to rob or steal this hope from our hearts. They are hope stealers! They steal away the hope of Christ's imminent return from our hearts. Their church hymnals and songs are much different when it comes to the return of Christ. I believe that it was Donald Gray Barnhouse who wrote some revised words to the hymn "Glad Day." These words should be embraced by all those who reject the imminent return of Jesus Christ and believe the Church is going to pass through the Tribulation Period. The words go something like this:

"Jesus can't come today,
Sad day! Sad Day!
I'll live out each day and anxious be,
The Beast and False Prophet I soon shall see.
Sad day! Sad day!
Jesus can't come today."

The Recanting of the Blessed Hope

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 says:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ (Lord) is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except

there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”

Some were teaching that the believers were already living in the Tribulation Period and that the promised coming of Christ in the Rapture had not occurred as planned – prior to the Tribulation Period. In essence, they recanted the teaching of the blessed hope. Paul was very adamant and inflexible when telling the people that this was wrong eschatology. The saints could not be living in the Tribulation Period (Day of the Lord) for at least three reasons.

1. Because the departure has not yet taken place and this event cannot occur until the Day of the Lord has begun (vs. 3).

The Church could not be living in the Day of the Lord since the departure on planet earth did not yet occur. Paul is teaching that a departure will occur on earth to signal that the Day of the Lord has now commenced upon earth. The word for “falling away” actually means departure and probably has reference to the complete doctrinal departure from truth that will occur among the professing church following the Rapture. After God’s true Church is raptured only the professing church will be left. This is seen as the great harlot church of Revelation chapter seventeen (Rev. 17:1-6). Total apostasy will then overtake the church on earth.

2. Because the Antichrist has not yet been revealed and this revelation cannot occur until the Day of the Lord has begun (vs. 3).

The Church could not be living in the Day of the Lord since the Antichrist has not yet been revealed. Paul is teaching that the Antichrist will be revealed on the world scene to signal that the Day of the Lord has commenced upon the earth. Paul makes it clear that it will not be until after the Rapture has occurred and during the Day of the Lord that the Antichrist will be revealed on the world scene and begin His reign of terror and wickedness (vs. 8). It’s true that the Antichrist may be living in the world today, but he will not be revealed as the Antichrist until the Day of the Lord has begun.

3. Because the Holy Spirit's restraining influence must be taken out of the world and this cannot occur until the Day of the Lord has begun (vs. 7).

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (holds back or restrains) will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

The Church could not be living in the Day of the Lord since the Restrainer has not yet been taken out of the way. Paul is teaching that the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry will cease in the world to signal that the Day of the Lord has commenced upon earth. The Holy Spirit is the Restrainer in this world. It is through God's people, the New Testament Church, that the Holy Spirit restrains sin in some measure. But when the true Church is raptured prior to the Day of the Lord and the Day of the Lord commences on planet earth, it's then that the restraining ministry of the Spirit will no longer be felt in this world as it once was doing this age of grace. The Holy Spirit will remain on earth but His restraining effect upon sin will no longer be operating in the world during the Day of the Lord.

The conclusion is simple. The Church could not possibly have entered the time period known as the Day of the Lord since the events mentioned above, which were prophesied to transpire during the prophetic drama of the Day of the Lord, had not yet occurred. Since none of these events have occurred the Church could not possibly be in the Day of the Lord.

It was serious error to conclude that the saints were already living in the Tribulation Period before the Rapture had taken place. I agree with Paul who concludes that it is a false teaching that says God's people are going into the Tribulation Period before the Rapture occurs. This is false teaching and Paul was quick to point it out as error. He would not put up with it and let it run ramped within the Church. We must confront eschatological error today when erring brothers and sisters teach false schemes of eschatology and place believers in the Tribulation Period before the Rapture can occur. We cannot and must not accept their error as being an accurate assessment of God's end-time prophetic program. Paul would not

accept any error associated with the timing of the Rapture and neither should we today.

Paul was aware of those men who were trying to rob the saints of the blessed hope which they had in relationship to Christ's Return. The saints were to possess the hope of rescue from all earthly trial and judgment. They were to believe at any moment that they might experience salvation and final redemption from all earthly calamities and trials, even the greatest trial of the coming tribulational night (1 Thess. 1:10). So, Paul says that they should not be "shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us" (2 Thess. 2:2).

Obviously, some were forging letters claiming that Paul had written them. They were signing Paul's name to letters, which taught that the Church would not escape the coming judgment of the Day of the Lord. But Paul was very uncompromising and unbending about the teaching of Christ's coming and the blessed hope. He assures them that these were not his letters or the apostolic teaching on the Rapture. In fact, Paul warns, "Let no man deceive you by any means..." (2 Thess. 2:3).

Like the Thessalonians, believers today must not be deceived by any person, no matter how credible and charismatic he might appear to be, or by the way he presents his teaching. He may claim to be speaking the authority of God and in many ways exemplify godliness in his life. But we must put everything aside Paul says and "Let no man deceive you by any means..." We are living in a day and time when spurious views on the Rapture are being promoted which teach that believers will advance into the Day of the Lord or the Tribulation Period. Much confusion exists today in the realm of eschatology because of strained and spiritualized exegesis of Scripture. The blessed hope, which is tied to Christ's imminent return, is being totally lost in the present-day distortion of eschatology.

How sad when those who teach error deceive sincere believers and lead them down a wrong path. Those who teach falsities about the Rapture occurring during the Day of the Lord actually steal from the hearts of believers the blessed hope that is to be connected with the coming of Christ. "Let no man deceive you by any means..." Don't be

deceived! Don't lose the confident and happy expectation and hope that we have in our hearts in relationship to the imminent coming of Christ and our final release and rescue from all earthly trial, turmoil and testing.

Redemption and the Blessed Hope

The blessed hope is the promise that Jesus could suddenly appear at any moment, morning, night or noon, and deliver believers from every trial, so that they will never again experience any more sorrow, tribulation or earthly temptation. It is the hope that Jesus could return today without warning and descend into the atmospheric heavens above and catch His Bride away to Heaven, giving them final release and redemption from every earthly trial or tribulation – including the seven-year Tribulation Period that is to come upon planet earth (Rev. 3:10).

Titus 2:13-14

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Dear friend, has some man, some teaching, some medical circumstance that you are facing, or the general cares of this world, stolen this blessed hope from your heart? Are you no longer expecting Christ to return at any moment? Maybe your mind and heart have been centered upon your own earthly goals and circumstances and as a result you are no longer looking forward with great expectation for Christ's imminent return. Earthly pleasures, earthly cares and earthly ambitions have a way of stealing the blessed hope from our hearts. It could be that the fast pace of earthly living has caused you to lose sight of the ever-present reality of your imminent release and final redemption.

The fleeting things of this world may have captivated your heart and because of this you no longer have your eye to the sky (1 John 2:15-17). You no longer are in tune to the realization and ever-present reality that Jesus may come today! You no longer wake in the morning with the blessed hope in your heart and say with confidence,

“Perhaps today!” Then too, you may be following a prophetic interpretive scheme that robs the return of Jesus Christ from imminency or a sudden and unexpected arrival. Have you lost the blessed hope that you once had and held dear to your heart?

Remember how precious those days were when you embraced this glorious hope in your heart and when you could look forward to your sudden release and deliverance from all earthly trials and the coming years of future tribulation upon earth? If you have been robbed of this treasured truth in your heart, I would ask you to believe the simple teaching of God’s prophetic Word and allow the truth of the imminent return of Christ to bring hope to your heart once again.

An examination was being held in little Emma's class at school and the question was asked: "Upon what do hibernating animals subsist during the winter?" Emma thought for a few minutes and then wrote: "All winter long, hibernating animals subsist on the hope of a coming spring!" In a similar way, believers are to survive and sustain themselves with the hope of Christ’s imminent return. They are to live in light of Christ’s any moment return. They are to remember their own accountability before Him (1 John 2:28) and their final redemption and rescue from all trials and tribulations, including the future seven-year Tribulation Period.

The apostle Paul encourages believers to look forward to “that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). We are to be anticipating the day when the Lord Jesus returns to take us home to be with Himself (John 14:1-3) and realize that it could happen at any moment (Phil. 3:20). We should be standing on our tiptoes with expectation. Perhaps Today! The blessed or happy hope and earnest prayer that I have in my heart today is the same hope reflected in the words of the apostle John: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).