

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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Love the Thought of His Appearing

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As his life in his body of death neared its end, Paul, the beloved apostle testified, to Timothy, his son in the faith, that he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). It seems that the Spirit of God had revealed to him that his time of release had not only come but that in the future, that is, in the **Day of Christ** (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16), he would be awarded the **crown of righteousness**, something he sought for from God through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9).

In his epistle to the Philippians, which I place on par with his second epistle to Timothy, Paul declared: **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 3:14). His goal was to be found worthy of the *out*-resurrection or *first* resurrection that would give him the privilege of reigning with Christ in His millennial Kingdom. We could say that his prize was the crown of righteousness.

But Paul carried his thought one step further by joining the reward of the crown of righteousness to loving the appearing of the Lord. In other words, those who love His appearing will receive this crown when He comes a second time in what Paul called the **Day of Christ**.

Consider how Paul's encouraging word has been translated in the following seven translations.

In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8 NASB)

For the rest, the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me in that Day, and not only to me, but also to all the ones loving His appearance. (2 Timothy 4:8 LITV)

Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8 DNT)

From this time onward there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love the thought of His Appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8 WNT)

So a crown will be given to me for pleasing the Lord. He judges fairly, and on the day of judgment he will give a crown to me and to everyone else who wants him to appear with power. (2 Timothy 4:8 CEV)

And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day—and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear. (2 Timothy 4:8 GNB)

The prize that shows I have God's approval is now waiting for me. The Lord, who is a fair judge, will give me that prize on that day. He will give it not only to me but also to everyone who is eagerly waiting for him to come again. (2 Timothy 4:8 GW)

Notice the slight variation in each translation, some of which are paraphrased, not literal translations. They go from having loved His appearing to eagerly waiting for Him to come.

But this raises the questions: How do we eagerly wait for Him to come? How do we keep expectancy alive each and every day? Or, can we and should we maintain a daily expectancy?

Frankly, I do not think we can maintain the same level of eagerness or expectancy every day, and I am not so sure the Lord expects us to do so. So what is the answer? Perhaps it is discovered in the way the Weymouth New Testament (WNT) states it: **But also to all who love the thought of His Appearing.**

It seems to me that it is much easier to keep alive a thought that loves His appearing than it is to eagerly expect Him to literally come on any day, which, as I have stated previously, cannot be true, since He must come at the appointed time, especially in relation to the fall feasts.

But what does it mean to love the thought of His appearing?

On one level, and probably the highest level, it is to love the thought of seeing Him face to face, as we love Him daily in our hearts. After all, if He is the love of our life, then we should want to see Him with a fondness and eagerness. When we are deeply in love with someone, our thoughts are on that person. It should be no different in our love relationship with our Lord. Of course, over time, this love deepens and matures. I know my love for my wife has matured over the last 38 years to the point that we enjoy being together without having to say a word; just being together without demands or expectations is an expression of our deep and enduring love for each other. I believe it is the same way with our love for the Lord. We can take comfort that He is with us even when there are no words exchanged. We just know that He is with us throughout the day, regardless of what we are doing or going through.

Yet, on another level, to love the thought of His appearing is to love what will transpire when we do see Him face to face. In other words, it is a love of the change that will come when we are transfigured into His image, when we become like Him and enter into His glory, free from all the shackles of this life.

I don't think we realize the full weight of the baggage we carry around each and every day of our lives as we live in mortal bodies. We have come to accept as normal a life often filled with controversy, conflict, pain, doubt, fear, anxiety, demand, decision, and suffering. I know there are good and happy things as well, but stay with me in this vein for a moment. Let's face it; life is not always, as they say, a bed of roses, meaning something beautiful and fragrant. Peter wrote of fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul and warned of the adversary, the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 2:11; 5:8). Paul wrote that the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). Peace is often elusive, as well. Then there are times when the inexplicable comes along, and we are left scratching our heads and saying: "What happened? Why? What do I do now?" Conflict abounds!

Perhaps the best answer comes through Paul.

(16) Wherefore, we faint not [do not lose heart], but if also our outward man doth decay, yet the inward is renewed day by day; (17) for the momentary light matter of our tribulation [affliction], more and more exceedingly an age-during [literally, eonian] weight of glory doth work out for us— (18) we not looking to the things seen, but to the things not seen; for the things seen are temporary, but the things not seen are age-during [literally, eonian]. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 YLT [NASB])

We do not lose heart, for something grand lies ahead; it is called the glory of God. What we experience in this life is temporary; it will not last and will not follow us into glory. We will leave it behind as we enter into the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

I credit my wife with this thought. She had been thinking about loving His appearing, and she had a "light bulb" moment as she realized how difficult it is to maintain a daily expectancy of the literal appearing of the Lord, or even preparedness for it. However, what she could maintain was a love of the thought of what it means to be like Him, when all this baggage (momentary, light affliction) of life is removed, and we are in glory with Him. Think about how glorious it will be when **we live according to the perfect will and peace of God, love with the perfect love of God, and walk in the perfect righteous law of God.** This is glory! When we see Him, we will be like Him in immortality and in His glory. Every day that we live in mortal bodies is a contrast to what lies ahead. So, let us love Him and long for Him; and as we do, let us love the thought of what it means to be like Him.