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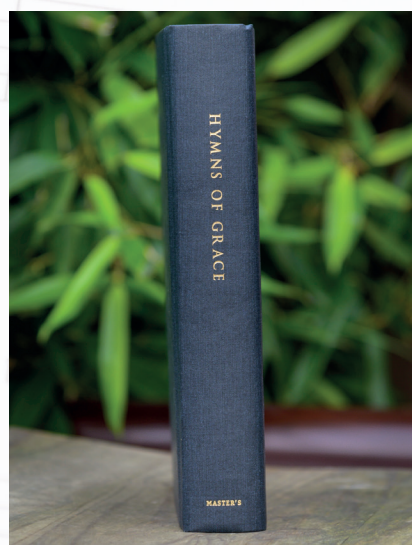
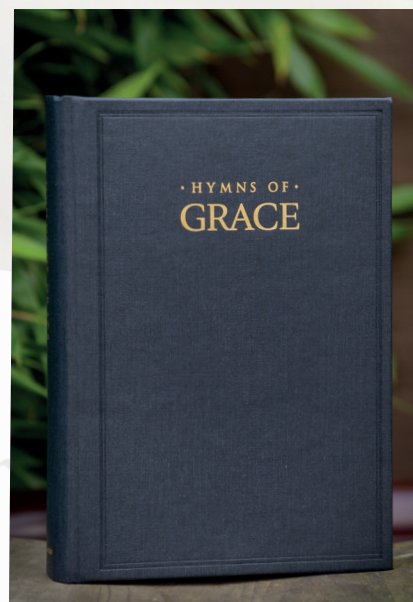
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John MacArthur

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A hand in a blue shirt points to a map of Europe and Africa. The map shows various countries and bodies of water. The title 'MINISTRY UPDATE' is overlaid in large, bold, black letters.

MINISTRY UPDATE

FROM GTY EUROPE

By D Paul Mitchell

I was often asked by various people, Christian and non-Christian, how the ministry was managing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those asking this question always seemed to be genuinely surprised when I told them we had never been busier, and they were amazed when I gave a few examples of what the Lord was doing through Grace to You generally, and Grace to You Europe specifically. Some people cannot comprehend that over 2 million sermons are being downloaded from the GTY website each month, or that 100,000 + people tune in each day to our U.K. radio ministry. Whilst I expect non-Christian people to be astonished or even sceptical at these statistics, I am especially bemused by the reaction of many Bible-believing Christians to my reply; it's as if they have never read Matthew 16:18.

It may be counter-intuitive to the unregenerated mind, but to the mind renewed by God and sanctified by the Word of God, it should not be surprising to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is keeping His promise regarding His Church. Yes, we may hear of abominations within the so-called mainstream denominations, but these organisations (whilst having some authentic Christians within their memberships) are not the true Church of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ is His bride (see Ephesians 5:25-27), and He will not present to Himself that which would bring reproach, ridicule, and dishonour to His holy and precious name. The honour and glory of His name is of such concern to the Lord that He will do anything to protect it from being brought into disrepute, which is why we shouldn't be shocked when we hear of once famous Christian musicians renouncing the faith, or when prominent pastors are exposed as sexual predators. Jesus Christ will do whatever is necessary to beautify His bride, He will not rest until He has removed every spot, wrinkle, and blemish (see Ephesians 5:25-27). So, whilst we should be grieved when some church sex scandal is exposed in the media, we shouldn't be shocked, in fact it is exactly what we should expect if the Lord is



at work. And what is true of the church corporately is also true of us individually. If we genuinely belong to Christ, we should expect Him to do whatever is necessary in our lives to bring us into conformity to His will as revealed in His Word (see 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

During the past year or so I have had the privilege of speaking with many brothers and sisters in Christ, living in the U.K. and across Europe, and it's evident from what they tell me and from what we observe that the Lord is separating the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, the hirelings from the true shepherds, the delusional hypocrites from the authentic Christians. Therefore, it doesn't surprise me that we are seeing such a demand for the kind of verse-by-verse Bible teaching that has characterised John MacArthur's ministry for over 52 years. Those who are spiritually starving and parched will keep returning to the same place where their hunger is satisfied, and their thirst quenched. So, whilst I'm delighted to know that so many Christians are being helped and blessed by GTY, I'm not surprised, because it's what I expect of Him who said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". Whilst spiritually bankrupt and impotent man-made religious institutions cannot prevail against the gates of hell, the dynamic and irresistible battering ram of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ can and does.

Faithful not Fearful

One of my greatest concerns during the pandemic has been the way some church leaders have acted more like agents of a totalitarian state than shepherds of Christ's sheep. Whilst we should not in any way trivialise the seriousness of COVID-19, or the huge and onerous responsibility placed upon church leaders in keeping their congregants safe, I have been deeply troubled by the numerous people who have contacted our office, distressed by the way their church leaders have zealously implemented sets of rules and regulations that go way beyond those issued by the Government. However, my greatest concern has been the lack of prayer within the churches, both locally and nationally. Tragically, many church leaders have not grasped the serious spiritual repercussions caused by their wholly inadequate response to the pandemic. Even self-confessed atheists have commented in the national media on the spiritually weak and fear-filled bishops who ordered churches to be kept closed and clergy to maintain social distancing, when the right and scripturally faithful course of action should have been prayerful intercession (1 Timothy 2:1-4), courage ministry of the word (2 Timothy 4:2), and practical demonstration of Christ's compassion for the weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:28-30). However, we are very thankful to the Lord for those steadfast pastors who understood the Apostle Paul's admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-7 and diligently discharged their ministry with confidence and all faithfulness during exceptionally troubling times – such men are surely Christ's gift to His church (see Ephesians 4:11-14).

Too Posh to Pray

It appears that the church in much of the U.K. and Western Europe has become indolent and “at ease in Zion”, displaying similar characteristics to the church of Laodicea, which was prosperous and trusting in its



wealth to the point it had no real needs, and in fact it had few if any true believers within its membership. And because it had few if any true believers, it couldn't see any point in praying for something it didn't need or want.

When Christians cease to depend upon their Heavenly Father to provide for their daily needs, they are inclined to become complacent, indifferent to sin, unconvinced of the need for, or of the power of, prayer, even embarrassed to talk about prayer; never mind engaging in it when they have been deceived into believing that science can solve all their problems. And yes, perhaps some Christians have even become too posh to pray!

Always Reforming

It has been said that God has no grandchildren, and each generation must be evangelized, because falling away and apostasy can happen with alarming speed. This can be seen in the rapid decline of New England Puritanism. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones observed that the fathers (the original Puritans) were holy men, their sons (the second generation) were well educated and cultivated a commendable work ethic, so they prospered in business and became wealthy. However, their grandsons (the third and successive generations), who hadn't been persecuted and who hadn't struggled for a pure church as their grandfathers had, became apostates, embracing Unitarianism, a heretical and false form of Christianity. It's interesting to note that New England now has the largest number of Unitarian “churches” and the least number of scripturally faithful churches anywhere in the U.S.A.

For the many Christians who are currently living at ease in Zion, it would be very humiliating to do what the penitent Jews did during Nehemiah's reforms. Those days had many exact parallels with our times, including wide-spread ignorance of God's word and indifference to serious sin. So, what action did the spiritual leaders take to try and remedy this situation? They erected a wooden pulpit! From the elevated position of the pulpit, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses and the Levites went amongst the gathered people to help them understand not only what God was saying through His word, but how they should practically obey His word. Understanding of the word brought awareness of sin and a genuine demonstration of contrition.

Nehemiah 8:6 Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses: **And they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.** (ESV)

As the word was read and carefully explained



verse-by-verse, so the Lord worked with gracious power amongst the people; minds were renewed, hard hearts were softened, and obstinate wills became inclined to obedience. There was no pride in their insignificant and worldly achievements, but rather sorrow, remorse, confession, and genuine repentance, demonstrated in the putting away of their foreign wives along with their false gods.

Whilst it is true that all is not well within the churches in the U.K. and Western Europe, it is not all gloom and doom elsewhere – far from it! The Lord Jesus Christ will never abandon His sheep to the wolves and GTY Europe is supporting some of the many young men whom Christ is calling, equipping, and gifting to His church in this generation. These young shepherds face many difficulties that were unknown to previous generations of pastors, but I am impressed with the calibre and faith of these men, who are willing to forgo potentially lucrative careers and the world's approbation, to preach and teach God's word and carefully and compassionately shepherd Christ's sheep and lambs, often in obscure and out of the way places. One of these young men is Stefan Ralevic, and I hope you will be encouraged by the inclusion of his story in this magazine.

Prison Ministry

One of the strengths of radio ministry is the ability to reach people with the Gospel in places that we would otherwise find very difficult to access; this is especially true of prisons. We never specifically intended to have a prison ministry, but we continue to receive many letters from inmates of prisons located all over the U.K, telling us how the Lord has used the GTY daily broadcasts to enable them to hear the good news of the Gospel, and this has resulted in

the acknowledgement of their sin, the repentance of their sin, and the casting of themselves on the mercy of God by embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Some of the testimonies to God's grace are quite remarkable (as you can read elsewhere in this magazine) and, through regular contact with some of these individuals over a period of many years, we have discerned a distinct change in their lives as they have been exposed daily to John MacArthur's verse-by-verse teaching of the Bible.

Romania

During the past 12 months we have continued to progress our Grace Reaches Out project in Romania and this has included the creation of a recording studio in Arad. A team consisting of translators, editors, audio technicians and presenters are in the process of making 600 of John MacArthur's most significant sermons accessible to Romanian people, the project is being led by our good friends Pastor Ilie Bledea and Pastor Dani Scurt. In due course these sermons will be available through the GTY website and will also be broadcast on radio in Romania, Moldova, and through internet radio to the world-wide Romanian diaspora. In addition, thanks to the sacrificial generosity of U.K. based supporters of GTY Europe, we have now begun the translation of the MacArthur Study Bible into Romanian.

Ashford Office

We are thankful to the Lord for the way He has preserved the GTY Europe ministry team during the past year. Sadly, like some of you reading this, we too have experienced the deaths of close family members from COVID-19, and we have each had our own health issues, but this has taught us to lean more fully on Christ and we can testify to His grace being completely sufficient in the most trying of circumstances.

We really value the partnership of each member of our GTY family, and the support given to us through prayer, financial gifts, letters, emails, and phone calls. Before we start each working day, we have a time of prayer, and it's such a blessing to remember many of you by name before the Throne of Grace, even as we know you remember us. If you have a specific prayer request then send us a brief email and we will bring it before the Lord.

Yours by God's grace and in Christ's love,

Paul

Director GTY Europe

THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

*One man's remarkable account of how God used
Grace to You to lead him to the Saviour.*

My name is Mike, and I was born in Kent during the early nineteen sixties and grew up attending the local Roman Catholic church, where I loved to sing in the choir. Sadly, from the age of 5 until I was 11, I was sexually abused by a male friend of the family and my way of dealing with the trauma this caused was to visit the chapel of a religious order located near to my home; there I would spend hours quietly praying and attending the Mass. The ritual and ceremony of the services seemed out of this world to me, I loved being there and in that sacred place I was safely out of reach of my abuser.

As a young man I met and married a lovely girl from Southern Ireland, and we moved to her hometown, where I was employed as an administrator within the Catholic church and 2 of the schools it controlled. In many ways it was my dream job, working for the church gave me a sense of purpose and satisfaction in that I was serving God. However, too soon my dream was shattered when one morning my wife and I discovered our baby son Richard had died during the night from what was later diagnosed as a cot-death. Richard's death caused my world to fall apart, and rather than supporting my wife in her grief, I began to drink heavily, which ultimately led to the break-up of our marriage and my returning to Kent alone.

Back in Kent I gained some solace by attending the services in the chapel where I had found a place of

refuge as a boy; in fact, I remained in Kent for many years and became friendly with the priests who served in the chapel. Eventually, in an effort to put the sadness of the past behind me, I moved away from Kent and tried to start a new life by purchasing a Public House. Owning a pub was probably not the best job for someone with a history of problems with alcohol, added to this were the difficulties created by my personal relationships, this was further exacerbated by the struggles I had in trying to make the business financially viable. Inevitably, this toxic mix of drink, relationship problems and financial worry came to a head and one day in a state of drunkenness and jealousy I found myself on the wrong end of a firearm and killed someone who had previously been dear to me.

At this point I was 50 years old without any criminal record whatsoever, I had never experienced any problems with the Police or the Law – not even a parking ticket! But now I had committed the most serious of all criminal offences and after my arrest and conviction I was sentenced to life in prison.

Ironically, having moved away from Kent to escape the past, I found myself back there again to begin my sentence in a prison on the Isle of Sheppey. Being in a place where I couldn't obtain alcohol allowed me to see things much clearer than I had ever been able to before, and after a year of good behaviour I was given the job

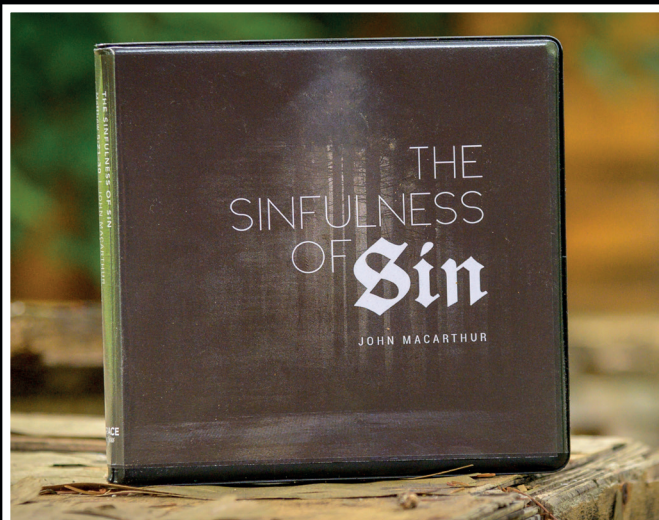
of caretaker for the prison chapel. Whilst tidying up the chapel bookshelves, I discovered a set of 6 GTY CDs with the title of The Sinfulness of Sin. I had never heard of John MacArthur, but I decided that I would take the CDs back to my cell and listen to what he had to say. That was over 11 years ago, and it was through John's preaching of the gospel contained within that 6 CD set that I came to understand that I was a wretched sinner and in the sight of a Holy God who hates sin, I was not only guilty of the terrible crime of murder and deserving of my life sentence in prison, but I was guilty of every sin I had ever committed during my entire life and was fully deserving of being sentenced to eternity in hell.

Through God's grace working in my life, I was able to write to the man who abused me when I was a child telling him that I forgave him. I also wrote to the priests at the chapel, explaining to them about what the Lord had done in my life and asking where I stood in the sight of the church, as I hoped that I might be allowed to undertake some theological studies whilst in prison, with the intention that I could eventually serve God in some capacity. After a long wait, I received a brief note from a priest informing me that I was not eligible to serve because I was a convicted criminal. I was stunned and could not believe what I was reading, and it also dawned upon me that this meant I was no longer accepted as a member of the Roman Catholic church. However, whilst I was very disappointed by the rejection of the church, I knew that I was accepted by God because His Son the Lord Jesus Christ had died on Calvary's cross to save me and cleanse me from my sins. Yes, I was a terrible sinner in the eyes of the world, and even in the eyes of some people within the church, but in God's sight I was a sinner saved by His amazing grace.

Over the years I have been greatly helped by the staff at the GTY office in the U.K and they have blessed me with a MacArthur Study Bible and many books and CDs, which have enabled me to grow in my understanding of God's word and how I can obey it. As I have grown in my faith, I have been able to start a prayer group and Bible study with other prisoners and we regularly gather to listen to the Grace to You broadcasts. As men from our group have been moved to other prisons, they have started new prayer groups and I know of at least 9 such groups across 4 different prisons.

On behalf of myself and the other members of our prison Bible study and prayer group, I would like to thank everyone at GTY and all the Christians who support the ministry, because we wouldn't be able to tune in each day to the verse-by-verse Bible teaching broadcasts or access so many wonderful resources free of charge without your generosity.

Mike



THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

John MacArthur

"Am I really all that bad?"

If you haven't said those words, you've probably at least thought them. And with reason - you can always find a worse offender, someone who has violated God's law to a degree you've never even approached. The fact is, there is probably a long list of sins you have never committed, never will commit, and would never even contemplate committing.

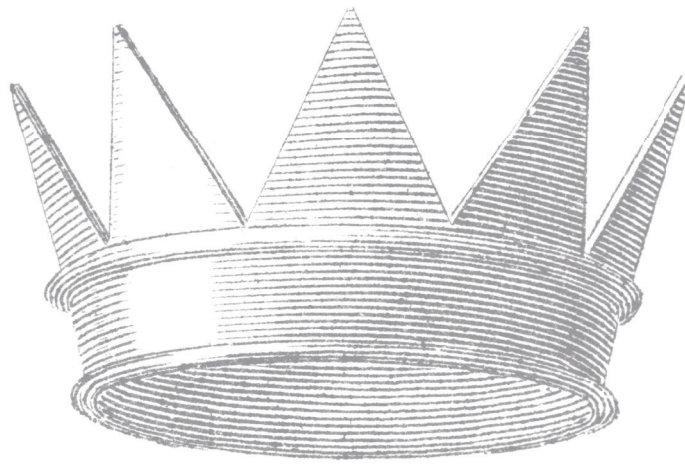
But does God measure sin on a sliding scale? What are His expectations, His standard? And not just for your behaviour, but also your thoughts - whether or not you act on them?

In The Sinfulness of Sin, John MacArthur moves you beyond shallow views of morality to expose the heart attitudes where sin takes root. Study these six messages to look at some of Jesus's hardest, most convicting teaching, and reveal areas in your life you may never have thought to scrutinize.

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

By John MacArthur

The Bible talks about the Judgment Seat of Christ - also referred to as the bema - in three places: Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10--4:5; and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Only church-age saints will appear at that judgment, as shown in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

The purpose of the bema is an exhaustive evaluation of our lives. First Corinthians 4:5 says the Lord will come and "bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

That passage reveals Paul's emphasis on the judgment seat of Christ. Notice that Paul says each man's praise will come to him from God. God gives rewards to the victors; He does not whip the losers. We know that He won't condemn us for our sins at that point, because Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Thus, the purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is to examine a Christian's total life. We will be recompensed for the deeds we have done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). The term used there refers to a summing up and estimation of the total pattern of a believer's life. This overall focus should keep us from worrying over every stupid thing we've ever

done, or thoughtless sin we have committed. It's a time of reward, not punishment.

At the same time, while we won't be condemned for our sins, our present lives do affect what will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Here's how:

Sin and indifference in this life rob us of our present desire for serving the Lord. That in turn means a loss of rewards because we will not have used our time to His glory. That is why Paul exhorts us to "be careful how [we] walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of [our] time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16, NASB).

Sin and indifference result in a loss of power in our lives because sin grieves the Holy Spirit.

Sin and indifference cause us to pass up opportunities for service, which we would otherwise perform and be rewarded for.

The greatest consequence of unfaithfulness here on earth is that it disappoints Christ. First John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." That is a sobering thought - we could be ashamed as we stand before the Lord. At the same time, it should encourage us with the prospect of receiving His lavish rewards if we serve Him faithfully during our time here on earth.

The 6 PILLARS OF SALVATION

AN EVANGELIST FINDS GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT IN 1 PETER 1:1-5

By Bob Hutton

Peter wrote his letter sometime around A.D. 64-65, when Nero's persecution of Christians living in Rome was really beginning to bite. The believers to whom this letter was originally addressed were scattered across Asia Minor (modern Turkey), but the tentacles of persecution had reached even this remote area of the empire and they were starting to experience the terrible consequences of the vicious lies being spread by the emperor, in which he claimed the Christians were responsible for the devastating fires that had laid waste Rome.

Persecution had brought suffering and many trials; their faith was being sorely tested, and so the apostle, with a true pastor's heart of compassion and in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, writes to provide encouragement by reminding them of the absolute security of the salvation that they have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The opening 5 verses set the scene for the epistle, as they contain 6 key words, which act like pillars in the household of God, the Church (1 Timothy 3:15), which of course is not a physical building, but comprises all those who have believed on Christ as their Lord and Saviour. We could also say that these pillars are holding up the edifice of our own individual Christian lives.

So, with our Bibles before us, let's consider these opening verses of 1 Peter 1 which contain 6 Pillars of Salvation, and as we do may we find the same encouragement as the original recipients of the letter who lived during times of great anxiety and insecurity.

1. Election

Our 1st key word, or pillar is Election (verses 1-2). Election - this literally means "to pick out" or "to select". In Old Testament times it was used of Israel, e.g. Deuteronomy 7 v 6. In the New Testament it is used as a term for Christian believers chosen by God for salvation. If we are to be encouraged, we are encouraged because we know that having believed in Christ we are of the elect and can never be lost. In John 10 v 27-29 we note that God the Father gave us to God the Son.

And when exactly did this giving by the Father and receiving by the Son occur?

Ephesians 1 v 4 tells that it was in eternity past, "before the foundation of the world".

The MacArthur Study Bible notes addressing this verse inform us thus:

Through God's sovereign will before the creation of the world and, therefore, obviously independent of human influence and apart from any human merit, those who are saved have become eternally united with Christ Jesus.

No gift given by the Father to the Son would ever have been rejected or returned to the giver as "unwanted". What an amazing reason to be encouraged; our salvation isn't dependent on what we do, but on what has already been done in eternity past – and the transaction was sealed and secured for the whole of eternity future by the precious blood of the Son shed on Calvary's cross.

Something of the immensity of this divine transaction is captured within one brief verse of the much-loved hymn, Man of Sorrows by Philip Bliss:

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

2. Grace

Our 2nd pillar is Grace (at the end of verse 2). If we can only use one word to sum up the Christian faith, then it must be GRACE – God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Grace can be defined as getting what we don’t deserve, viz. God’s goodness and kindness, and so on. Paul addresses this in Titus 3 v 3-5 where we are told of our past spiritual state, “but God” intervened in our lives and brought us to faith in Christ. The word Grace doesn’t appear in these verses, but the principle does. God saw us in our sin, yet He still loved us. In Titus 2 v 11 we read that it is the Grace of God “that brings salvation”. We are encouraged in this because as Christians we have personally experienced God’s grace in our lives, when the huge and heavy burden of our sin was lifted from our backs and placed upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ, as He suffered the out-pouring of God’s righteous indignation and wrath against sin on Calvary’s cross. We deserved the cross, but instead we got what we didn’t deserve – God’s Grace!

**“Therefore being justified
by faith, we have peace
with God through our
Lord Jesus Christ”**

Romans 5:1

**God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense**

3. Peace

Our 3rd pillar is Peace (also at the end of verse 2). This needs to be applied in two ways. Firstly, there is the joy of Peace with God. By nature, we are God’s enemies (see Ephesians 2 v 1-3); “but God” worked in us and turned us to Christ, therefore, we have the blessing of knowing we are right with Him. Romans 5 v 1 is clear on this matter: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. It is this knowledge (that we are right with God) that gives us assurance (and we’ll look at that in more depth in a moment).

Secondly, there is the contentment of the Peace of God. Philippians 4 v 6-7 is very helpful on this point. In the midst of difficult trials and adverse circumstances we can have a deep inner peace that the world cannot give, and the world cannot take away. In John 14 we find Jesus preparing for His death and departure back to the Father. He knew that what lay ahead would be extremely frightening and stressful for His disciples and would test their faith beyond anything they had ever experienced before.

So, what did He do?

He gave them peace, not just any old peace, certainly not the kind of false and deceptive peace that might be produced within the desperately wicked human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). He gave them His peace, and that peace can only be known and experienced by genuine Christians. Christ’s peace rules and maintains harmony in the most difficult of circumstances, the very kind of circumstances being experienced by the recipients of Peter’s letter, and the circumstances which will inevitably be encountered by us as we journey through this world of many troubles.

4. Mercy

Our 4th pillar is Mercy (verse 3). When we speak of God's mercy, we often refer to His general act of mercy in sending Christ into the world to die for our sins, and that is right and good. However, in this verse Peter seems to be referring to the mercy shown to us, as individuals. Two portions of scripture are particularly relevant here – in Romans 9 v 15-16 we are told that God shows mercy to whom He wishes, this is linked to John 3 v 8, where we read that the wind blows where it wishes “so is everyone who is born of the Spirit”. Just as we don't have control over the wind, so we can't have control over where the Holy Spirit will work, in whom He will “blow”, bringing them to faith in Christ.

Why are you a Christian when many others aren't?

The answer is simple: Because God has shown you mercy in blowing into your life, and as yet, has not shown that same mercy to others you may know.

The God who caused you to be born again through His mercy is the very same God who guarded and sanctified the Christians living in Asia Minor during Nero's persecution. He will continue to extend His mercy to you and me in the difficult moments we may face today and undoubtedly will face in the future.

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

5. Assurance

Our 5th pillar is Assurance – assurance of Heaven, of eternal life (see verse 4). This is particularly precious to me. Brought up as a Roman Catholic, I was told that to believe in the certainty of Heaven was “the sin of presumption”. As a child I yearned for this assurance which is denied by the Roman Catholic church, and I didn't receive it until the Holy Spirit brought me to trust in Christ and in Him alone for the forgiveness of my sins and a right standing before God.

In John 14 v 1-2 our Saviour makes it clear that all of God's children have a room allocated to them within the Father's House in Heaven, and Jesus will personally prepare our room, if we are His people. If we truly believe in Christ and all that He did for us on the cross it is not presumption, but certainty, that we have eternal life. We are encouraged as we reflect on this during our trials, looking not “at the things which are seen, but the things which are unseen” (2 Corinthians 4 v 17-18).

In the midst of trials, when doubts and fears assail our faith, we can know the strength and stability of the assurance that is ours in Jesus Christ. It may seem counter intuitive, but as John MacArthur points out in his booklet on Assurance:

“Trials are the crucible in which assurance is formed”.

He goes on to say, “What convinces you of your salvation? Hopefully it's the Word of God and your tested faith.”



“Trials are the crucible in which assurance is formed”

6. Faith

Finally, in verse 5 we have a 6th pillar – Faith. What exactly is faith? Hebrews 11 v 1 gives a simple answer – it is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”. There are lots of things we don’t understand – e.g., How can it be that the world came into being by God’s spoken word? We believe by this faith (Hebrews 11 v 3). Moreover, when it comes to the afflictions and distresses in our lives – we often can’t understand why God allows these things to happen. BUT we believe by faith that He is in control, and this encourages our hearts, even in the midst of the great trials we face.

It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that we are saved; it was faith at the beginning, and it will still be faith when we come to the end of our sojourn on this earth and receive our inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and incapable of fading away.

How can we be so sure we will really receive this inheritance?

Because it’s an inheritance that is not on earth, but reserved in heaven for those of us who are kept by the power of God through faith into the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In recent months there have been several widely published accounts of individuals being ecstatically

happy on receiving news that they had been left enormous and potentially life-changing inheritances in the Will of a deceased relative or friend, only to be crushingly disappointed when aggrieved members of the deceased’s family contested the validity of the Will in court. In some of these cases the plaintiffs have been awarded all, or a substantial part, of the inheritance. The original beneficiaries were left devastated and financially ruined because they had run-up enormous legal bills, which they thought they would be able to pay once they were successful in contesting their case and proving their entitlement to the inheritance.


This sad and distressing scenario is never going to be played out as far as our salvation is concerned. In order to banish any doubt from the minds of his readers, Peter tells them their inheritance is absolutely guaranteed, it’s in a place where no one can get their hands on it, where no one can contest their legal right to it.

And where exactly is it?

“reserved in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4)

The inheritance of every Christian is in the very same place where we are going to spend eternity - the very same place where the Lord Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us and preparing our individual rooms in the Father’s house. No person on earth or spiritual being in the heavenlies will dare contest or try to deny us our inheritance, because Christ secured it at the cost of His precious blood. No one will have the legal power to prevent us from taking up our eternal residency in the Father’s house, because God the Father has individually assigned us our place and Christ has personally prepared it. Our heavenly home is not a leasehold property, we will never be evicted, it’s ours for ever and ever.

Let’s be encouraged in knowing that whatever we face in these unpredictable times, these 6 pillars are holding us up, buttressing our faith in the truth, and more than that, they cause us to triumph and live victoriously day by day for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.



**“By faith
we understand
that the universe
was created by
the word of God”**

Hebrews 11:3

Bob Hutton is a member of Grace Baptist Church Thanet and an Associate Evangelist with the Open Air Mission.

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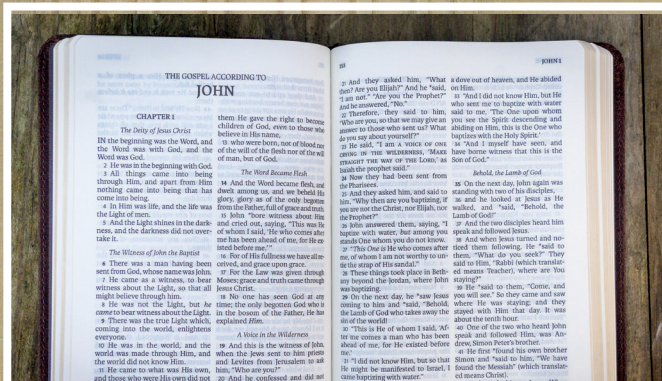
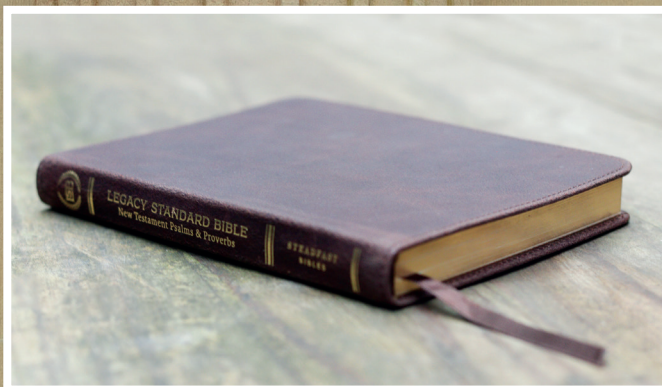
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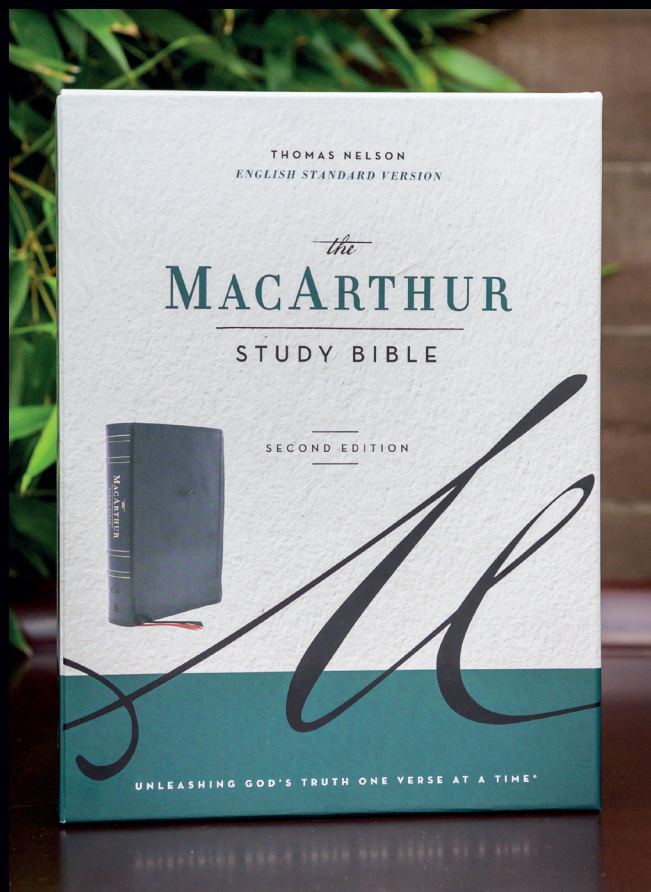
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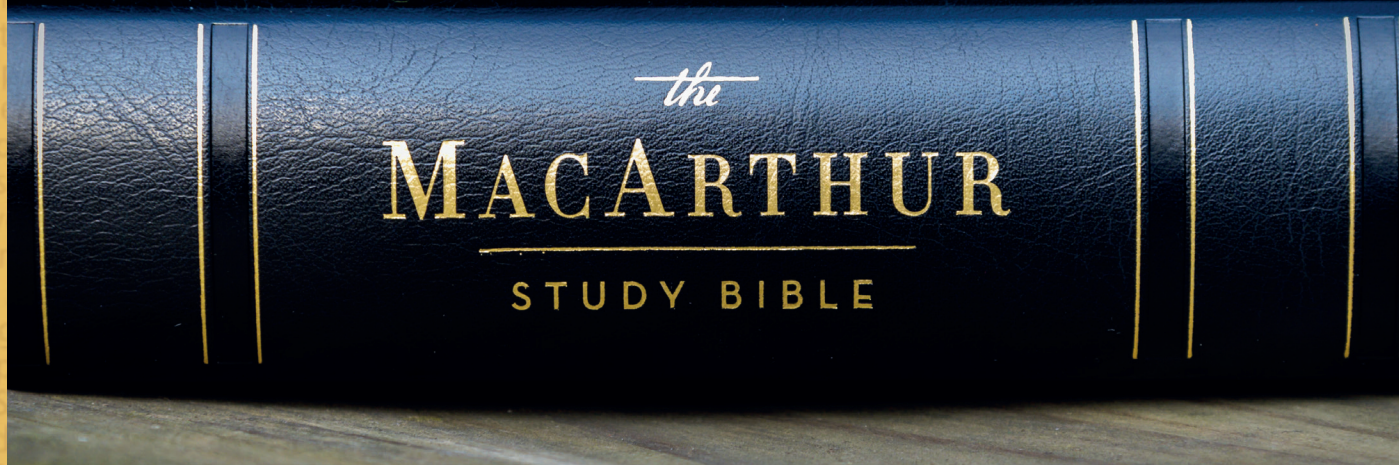


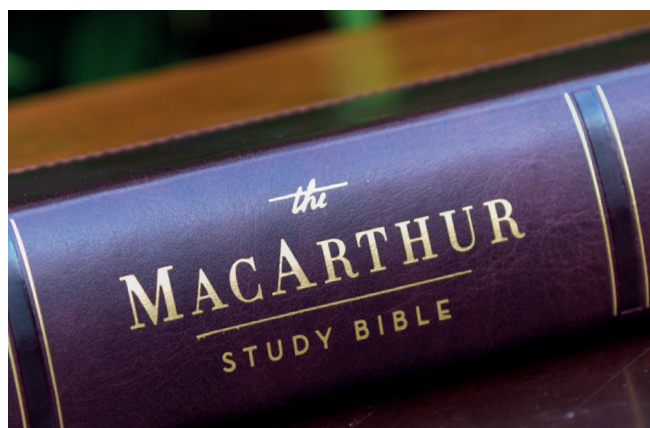
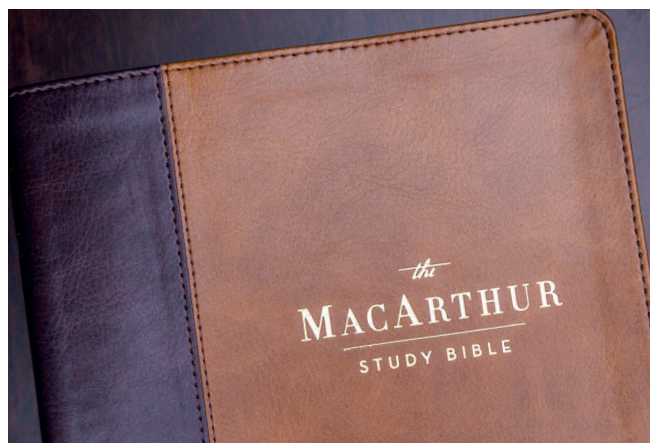
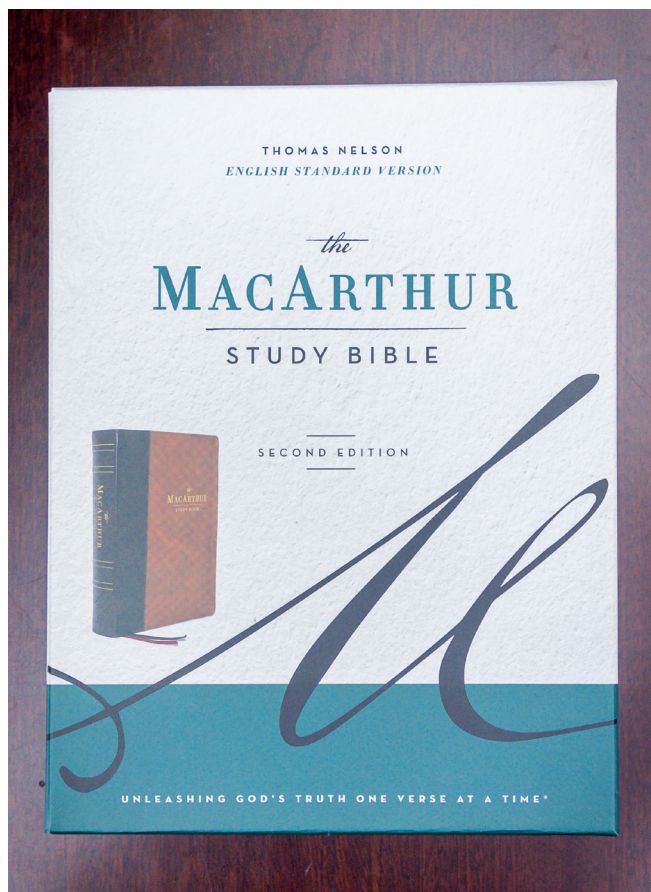
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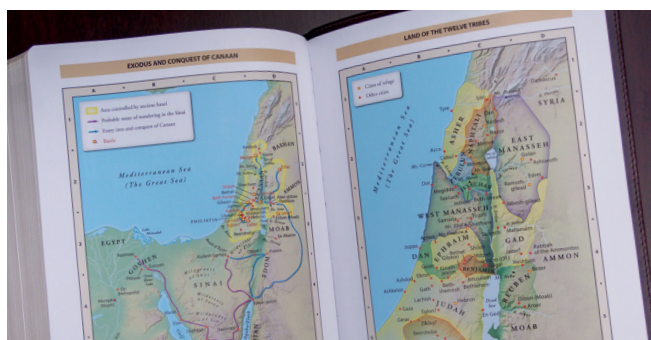
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Supporting Pastors in Eastern Europe

By Stefan Ralevic

After completing my theological training, I was invited to consider the pastorate of a Baptist Church in Backa Palanka, a small town on the banks of the River Danube in Serbia. The church was in a very poor state and was only one or two years away from closing and at that point there was little hope for revitalization - in fact, there were just 5 people present on the first occasion I visited and preached in November 2019. However, the members had been praying for a pastor for the past 10 to 15 years, but because there was no salary and financial security, no one had wanted to accept the call to minister there. After visiting the church on several more occasions, I felt the Lord was placing a burden on my heart for the church and the town of Backa Palanka and I became willing to work and preach for Him, even in these very discouraging circumstances. The church members are not well-off and with the bad Serbian economy they could only offer me a salary of 150 Euros a month, which is not sufficient to support myself and my wife, Daniela.

Apart from the few members at the Baptist church, I didn't know anyone in Backa Palanka and I began to think of how I would get to meet the people of the town and how they would get to know that I was the new pastor of the Baptist church. I started to pray, seeking the Lord's direction in reaching the people living in Backa Palanka with the Gospel, whilst also trying to find a job that would enable me to financially support myself and my wife.



And so, I started a CAR WASH BUSINESS!

The reaction of the people in Backa Palanka was one of great surprise: "You are a theologian and a pastor, and you are doing this hard work 8 to 10 hours per day?" During the first 6 months of starting my car wash business I personally met and had conversations with more than two hundred people from the town, and I was also featured in the town's on-line magazine. Soon many people knew that there was not only a new pastor in town, but one that washes cars in the centre of the city and preaches at the Baptist church on Sundays. My car wash business is called Auto-Moto Detailing, but people in Backa Palanka call it "Pastor's Car Wash".

The Lord has blessed the preaching of the Gospel and the church has grown to 10 members, and with young people and visitors, there is often around 20 present at the services. For me, who first started to preach with just 5 people, this is a miracle from the Lord - and I expect Him to perform even greater miracles!

It's not easy working 8-10 hours a day washing cars as well as preparing sermons, preaching twice on Sundays and fulfilling all the other responsibilities I have as a pastor, but I hope eventually to employ other Christians to manage the business so that I'm more available to focus on my pastoral ministry.



Is Christ's Return Imminent?

by John MacArthur

Christ could come at any moment. I believe that with all my heart - not because of what I read in the newspapers, but because of what I read in Scripture.

From the very earliest days of the church, the apostles and first-generation Christians nurtured an earnest expectation and fervent hope that Christ might suddenly return at any time to gather His church to heaven. James, writing what was probably the earliest of the New Testament epistles, expressly told his readers that the Lord's return was imminent:

Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is at hand**. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. **Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!** (James 5:7-9, emphasis added).

Peter echoed that same expectation when he wrote, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7). The writer of Hebrews cited the imminent return of Christ as a reason to remain faithful: "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). He wrote, "Yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (v. 37). And the apostle John made the most confident pronouncement of all: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is

coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). When John recorded his vision in the book of Revelation, he prefaced it by saying these things "must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1).

The New Testament writers often wrote of Christ's "appearing," and they never failed to convey the sense that this could happen imminently. "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28; cf. 3:2; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4).

All those texts suggest that in the early church expectation of Christ's imminent return ran high. A solid conviction that Christ could return at any time permeates the whole NT. When the apostle Paul described the Lord's coming for the church, he used personal pronouns that show he clearly was convinced he himself might be among those who would be caught up alive to meet the Lord: "**We** who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. . . **we** who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17, emphasis added). He obviously looked for Christ to return in his lifetime. He furthermore made it plain that a watchful, hopeful expectancy about Christ's Second Coming is one of the godly attitudes divine grace teaches all believers: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, **looking for**

the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11–13, emphasis added).

Will the Tribulation Precede Christ's Coming for the Church?

Nonetheless, some students of Bible prophecy today insist Christians should not have any immediate expectation of Christ's return. Instead, they say, we should be looking for the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period, the fulfilment of certain judgments and preliminary signs, the rise of the Antichrist – or all of the above. When they talk about future things, the emphasis is heavily weighted toward dread and disaster for the people of God. As far as they are concerned, "the blessed hope" becomes relevant only *after* the church has gone through the Tribulation.

At first glance, this position seems not altogether devoid of biblical support. After all, when Christ outlined the events of the last days, He included many prophecies about tribulation and hardship, and He said these signs would precede and point to His return (Matthew 24:21, 30).

The epistles also contain prophecies about apostasy and persecution in the last days preceding Christ's return. For example, the apostle Paul forewarned Timothy of perilous times that would come (2 Tim 3:1–3). He told the younger pastor, "The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith" (1 Tim 4:1) – and he went on to describe an apostasy that would precede and signify Christ's return to earth.

Those who believe the church must suffer through the hardships of the Tribulation period invariably cite 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 as proof:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for ***that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first***, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (emphasis added).

So, on the one hand, the NT is permeated with an eager sense of expectancy and conviction that the blessed hope of Christ's return is imminent. On the other hand, we are warned about trouble and affliction that will precede Christ's return. How can we reconcile these two threads of prophecy? How can

we cultivate a daily expectation of Christ's return if these preliminary signs must yet be fulfilled before He returns?

Several points must be borne in mind. First, all the general "signs of the times" given in the NT *have* been fulfilled—and *are being* fulfilled before our eyes. They are, in fact, characteristics of the entire church age. Apostasy and unbelief, self-love and sin, wars, rumours of wars, and natural disasters have all been common throughout the church age. Practically every generation of Christians since the time of Christ has believed they were seeing the end-times signs fulfilled before their very eyes. So how are we to know whether our own time is the true "last days" of Bible prophecy – or just more of the same general apostasy and calamity that have characterized the entire Christian era?

The apostle John settled that question under the Holy Spirit's inspiration when he wrote, "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). The church was *already* in "the last days" even before the apostolic era ended. In fact, "last days" is a biblical term for the Christian era itself (Hebrews 1:1–2). This entire age is a prelude to the culmination of human history. These *are* the last days—and so was the early church era.

Second, nothing in the NT ever suggests we should defer our expectation of Christ's appearing until other preliminary events can occur. The one apparent exception is 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 (quoted in full above), which says, "that Day [the day of the Lord] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed." That is obviously a key text for those who believe the Tribulation is next on the prophetic agenda, and that the church should be expecting the reign of Antichrist rather than the return of Christ. Indeed, if 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 actually means Christ's coming for the church cannot occur until after seven years of Tribulation, it nullifies everything the New Testament teaches about the imminence of Christ's return.

But look carefully at the context of 2 Thessalonians 2. The Thessalonian Christians had been confused and upset by some false teachers (possibly people pretending to speak for the apostle) who were teaching that the persecutions and sufferings they were currently experiencing were the very judgments associated with *the day of the Lord*. (The expression always refers to judgment and usually

to a time of apocalyptic judgment—cf. Isaiah 13:9–11; Amos 5:18–20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6:17; 16:14.) Many in the Thessalonian church, in the midst of their own severe hardship and distress, had evidently believed that lie, and they believed it meant they themselves had become objects of God’s final apocalyptic wrath. Obviously, they were deeply troubled by this, for in his earlier epistle, Paul had encouraged them by telling them of the *rapture* (1 Thessalonians 4:14–17) - the coming of Christ for his church. Paul had even instructed them to comfort one another with the promise of Christ’s coming for them (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

But now, in a time of severe persecution and trial, the Christians at Thessalonica had fallen prey to the false idea that God was already pouring out His final wrath - and *they* were among the objects of that wrath. They obviously feared they had missed the rapture and were about to be swept away in the final and epochal judgments of the Day of the Lord.

So Paul wrote, “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2). “The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” is a clear reference to the *rapture*. “The day of Christ” is *the day of the Lord* (in fact, the older manuscripts use the expression “day of the Lord” in this verse).

There were two aspects of the error troubling the Thessalonian church: one was the notion that they had missed the rapture. The other was the accompanying fear that they had already entered into the apocalyptic judgment that signalled the day of the Lord had arrived already.

And so when Paul says, “**that Day** will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, emphasis added) - he is talking about the day of the Lord and its apocalyptic judgment, not the rapture. He was not suggesting that the coming of Christ for the church would be delayed until after the Tribulation events had all played out. He was certainly not suggesting that the Thessalonians should defer their hope of Christ’s coming for them until the end of the Tribulation. He had spent his entire first epistle urging them to be watchful and expectant and to encourage one another with the news of Christ’s imminent return (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:1–9; 4:15–

18; 5:6, 9, 11). If the apostle now meant to teach them that all the events of the Tribulation must be fulfilled *before* Christ could return for them, that would be scant “comfort” indeed. In fact, it would overturn everything the NT has to say about Christ’s return being imminent, comforting, and hopeful.

So the consistent teaching of the NT is that Christians should be looking for the imminent coming of Christ for His church, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4 is no exception.

How Could Christ’s Coming Have Been Imminent in the Early Church?

Some argue that Christ’s coming could not possibly have been imminent for the early church, given the obvious fact that two thousand years later, He has still not returned. Sceptics often ridicule Christianity or challenge the inerrancy of Scripture on that very ground. After all, the verses cited at the beginning of this chapter do prove that James, Peter, John, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews all believed Christ’s return was very near - “at the door” (James 5:9); “at hand” (Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7); “approaching” (Hebrews 10:25); “com[ing] quickly” (Revelation 3:11; 22:7).

How can it be, then, that two thousand years later Christ still has not returned? Could the apostles have been in error about the timing? That is precisely what some sceptics claim. Here’s a typical excerpt from a newsletter whose sole aim is to attack the inerrancy of Scripture:

Paul, himself, showed . . . that he was among those who awaited the imminent return of Christ. Yet, as the history of that era clearly shows, all was for nought. No messiah appeared . . . The NT repeatedly says the messiah was to return in a very short time. Yet, mankind has waited for nearly 2, 000 years and nothing has occurred. By no stretch of the imagination can that be considered “coming quickly.” . . . It is, indeed, unfortunate that millions of people still cling to the forlorn hope that somehow a messiah will arise to extract them from their predicament. How many years (2,000, 10,000, 100,000) will it take for them to finally say, “We can only conclude that we are the victims of a cruel hoax”? *

What shall we make of this charge against the truthfulness of Scripture? Does the passing of two thousand years indeed prove that Christ’s coming was not imminent in the early church era, and that the apostles were mistaken?

Certainly not. Remember the clear statement of Christ in Matthew 24:42: “You do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” The exact time remains hidden from us, as it was from the apostles. But Christ could nonetheless come at any time. The Judge is still at the door. The day is still at hand. There are no other events that must occur on the prophetic calendar before Christ comes to meet us in the air. He could come at any moment. And it is in *that* sense that Christ’s coming is imminent. In the very same sense, His coming was imminent even in the days of the early church.

I suppose it is *also* possible that Christ could delay his coming another two thousand years or longer. Given the rapid decline of society, I do not see how that is possible, but neither did the apostles when they surveyed the state of the world in their time. He still *could* delay His coming. That is why Christ taught us to be prepared, whether He comes immediately or delays longer than we think possible (cf. Matthew 24:42–25:12).

In any case, the passing of two thousand years is no reproach whatsoever against the faithfulness of God or the trustworthiness of His Word. This is precisely the point Peter made when he anticipated the scoffers who would arise, mocking the promise of Christ’s return (2 Peter 3:3–4). Peter’s reply to those scoffers? “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). The amount of earthly time that passes is of no consequence. It is certainly irrelevant from God’s timeless point of view. A moment is like many eons in His mind, and eons pass like moments. He is not bound by time as we are, and no amount of time can ever nullify His faithfulness. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

In other words, the real reason for the Lord’s delay is not that He is negligent or careless in fulfilling his promises, but simply because He is longsuffering and kind, delaying Christ’s coming and the wrath that will accompany it while he calls out people to salvation. And Christ will not return before the merciful purposes of God are complete. Far from suggesting apathy or neglect on God’s part, the long delay before Christ’s appearing simply underscores the remarkable depth of His nearly inexhaustible mercy and longsuffering.

And therefore, the fact that two-thousand years have

elapsed is utterly irrelevant to the doctrine of Christ’s imminent return. Christ’s coming is *still* imminent. It could occur at any moment. The command to be ready and watchful is as applicable to us as it was to the early church. In fact, the return of Christ should be an even *more* urgent issue for us, because it is drawing nearer with the passing of each day. We still do not know *when* Christ is coming, but we do know that we are two thousand years closer to that event than James was in those earliest days of the Christian era, when the Holy Spirit moved him to warn the church that the coming of the Lord was at hand and the Judge was already standing at the door.

Why Is Christ’s Imminent Return So Important?

Why is it so important to believe that Christ could come at any moment? Because the hope of Christ’s imminent coming has a powerful sanctifying and purifying effect on us. “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). The knowledge that Christ’s coming is drawing closer should motivate us to prepare, to pursue Christlikeness, and to put off all the things that pertain to our former lives without Christ.

The apostle Paul took this very line of argument near the end of his epistle to the Romans. He reminded the believers at Rome of their duty to love their neighbours as themselves, saying love is the one principle that fulfils all God’s moral commands (Romans 13:8–10). Then stressing the urgency of living in obedience to this Great Commandment, he wrote,

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for *now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed*. The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:11–14).

That is the apostle Paul’s wake-up call to the church. Christ’s return is approaching. The time now is nearer than when we first believed. Every moment that passes brings Christ’s return even closer. How are we to redeem the time? He calls for a three-part response that perfectly sums up the Christian’s proper perspective on the imminent possibility of Christ’s return.



Wake up! “Awake out of sleep,” he pleads (Romans 13:11) - and he underscores both the urgency of this command and the imminency of Christ’s return, with four phrases: “now it is high time”; “our salvation is nearer” (Romans 13:11); “The night is far spent”; and “the day is at hand” (Romans 13:12). Time is short; opportunity is fleeting. The Lord is coming soon, and the event draws nearer every moment. The time to obey is now. The only time we can take for granted is now. And since there is no guarantee of *more* time, it is unconscionable to defer our obedience.

Consider this: The apostle Paul was stressing the urgency of this commandment in *his* day, two thousand years ago. He believed the coming of Christ was near - and getting nearer by the moment. How much *more* urgent are these things for our time? “Now our salvation is nearer” (Romans 13:11) - two thousand years nearer, to be precise. Now is certainly not the time to let down our guard or fall asleep. Although some might be tempted to think the long delay means Christ’s coming is no longer an urgent matter, a moment’s thought will reveal that if we believe Christ was speaking the truth when He promised to come again quickly, we *must* believe that the time is drawing nearer by the moment - and the urgency is not lessened by the delay but heightened.

It is perfectly natural for infidels, sceptics, and unbelievers to think Christ’s delay means He will not fulfil His promise (2 Peter 3:4). But no genuine believer should ever think that way. Rather than despairing because He tarries, we ought to realize that the time is nearer now than it has ever been. He *is* coming. As we saw earlier, His Word guarantees that He will come. Our hope should be growing stronger, not diminishing, as He delays his coming.

When Paul writes, “And do this, knowing the time” (Romans 13:11), he employs a Greek word for “time” (*kairos*), that speaks of an age or an era, not the time (*chronos*) told by a clock. “Knowing the time” therefore speaks of understanding this age,

being discerning, like “the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). Christ rebuked the Pharisees for lacking this same kind of discernment: “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times [*kairos*]” (Matthew 16:1–3).

Perhaps Paul had seen signs of spiritual lethargy or dullness among the believers at Rome. No doubt life in that great city held many distractions and earthly enticements that drew hearts away from the earnest hope of Christ’s appearing. Like the society in which we live, Roman life catered to the flesh, offering many material comforts and earthly amusements. Perhaps they were inclined to forget they were living in the last days. Spiritually, they were falling asleep.

It sometimes seems as if the entire church today is in an even worse state of spiritual drowsiness. There is widespread indifference concerning the Lord’s return. Where is the sense of expectation that characterized the early church? The sad legacy history will record about the church of our generation is that as we neared the dawn of a new millennium, most Christians were far more concerned about the arrival of a computer glitch known as the “millennium bug” than they were with the arrival of the millennial King!

Too many Christians in our time have settled into a state of insensate lethargy and inactivity - an unresponsiveness to the things of God. They are like Jonah, fast asleep in the hold of the ship while raging storms threaten to sweep us away (Jonah 1:5–6). They are like the foolish virgins, who “while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept” (Matthew 25:5). It is high time to awake from that slumber.

Paul sent a similar wake-up call to the church at Ephesus: “‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14–16). Never was such an alarm more needed than today. In the words of our Lord Himself, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35–36).

When Paul says “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11) - he is speaking, of course, about the *consummation* of our salvation. He was not suggesting that the Romans were unregenerate. He was not telling them their *justification* was a yet-future reality. He was reminding them that the culmination of what began at their regeneration was drawing closer by the moment. “*Salvation*” in this context refers to our glorification, the final goal of God’s saving work (Romans 8:30). Throughout Scripture, this is connected with the appearing of Christ: “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). We “eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil 3:20–21). “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). “He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). Notice that the writer of Hebrews employs the word *salvation* the same way Paul uses it in Romans 13:11.

This final aspect of salvation is what Paul referred to a few chapters earlier, in Romans 8:23: “We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” That is the aspect of our salvation that is nearer than when we first believed, and it only awaits Christ’s coming.

So, Paul’s penetrating appeal here in Romans 13 assumes that Christ’s return is imminent. If another eschatological age (*kairos*) - especially the Tribulation - were going to occur prior to Christ’s return for the church, Paul would have surely pointed to the onset of that era and urged the Romans to prepare for it. But far from warning them that a dark era of Tribulation was in their future, what he told them was virtually the opposite: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Romans 13:12). The *kairos* of persecution, hardship, and darkness was “far spent” (*prokopt_* in the Greek text - meaning “advancing quickly,” or “being driven out”). Daylight - the final consummation of our salvation when Christ returns to take us to glory - is imminent.

We have no idea how much sand remains in the hourglass of human history. But we ought to realize that a lot of sand has passed through the hourglass since the apostle Paul said the dawning of daylight was already at hand. How much more urgent is this wake-up call for the church today!

The night-time of Satan’s dominion will soon give way to the dawn of Christ’s coming for His own.

The apostle Paul used precisely the same imagery of darkness and dawn when he wrote to the Thessalonians:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:1–9).

God did not appoint us to wrath. The day of wrath that shall come in the Tribulation is not what we are to be preparing for. The sudden appearing of Christ to take us to glory is our hope. Wake up! Be sober. Be alert. Your redemption draws near.

Throw off! The approaching of dawn means it is time for a change of garments: “Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12). Paul’s imagery evokes the picture of a soldier who has spent the night in a drunken orgy. Still clad in the garments of his sin, he has fallen into a drunken sleep. But dawn is approaching, and now it is time to wake up, throw off the clothes of night, and put on the armor of light.

The Greek verb translated “cast off” was a term that spoke of being ejected or expelled forcefully. The Greek term is used only three other times in the New Testament, and in each case it speaks of excommunication from a synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). So the term carries the idea of renouncing and forsaking sin (or the unrepentant sinner) with vigour and conviction. Paul is calling for an act of repentance. He wants them to cast off - excommunicate, or break fellowship with - the “works of darkness.” It is the same expression he uses in Ephesians 5:11: “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

Paul often employs the imagery of changing garments to describe the putting off of sin and the old man. “Put off, concerning your former conduct,

the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22). "Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:8–9). Notice the twofold putting off: "*you have put off the old man with his deeds*"; but *keep putting off* "all these" works of darkness. The picture this evokes is that of Lazarus, raised from the dead, given new life, but still bound in old grave-clothes that still needed to be put off (cf. John 11:43–44).

Employing similar imagery, the writer of Hebrews urges believers to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). There he pictures the Christian like an athlete, stripped of all encumbrances and ready to run. There is much we must throw aside if we are to be prepared for the coming day. James sums it up succinctly: "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness" (James 1:21). And Peter echoes the thought: "laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking" (1 Peter 2:1).

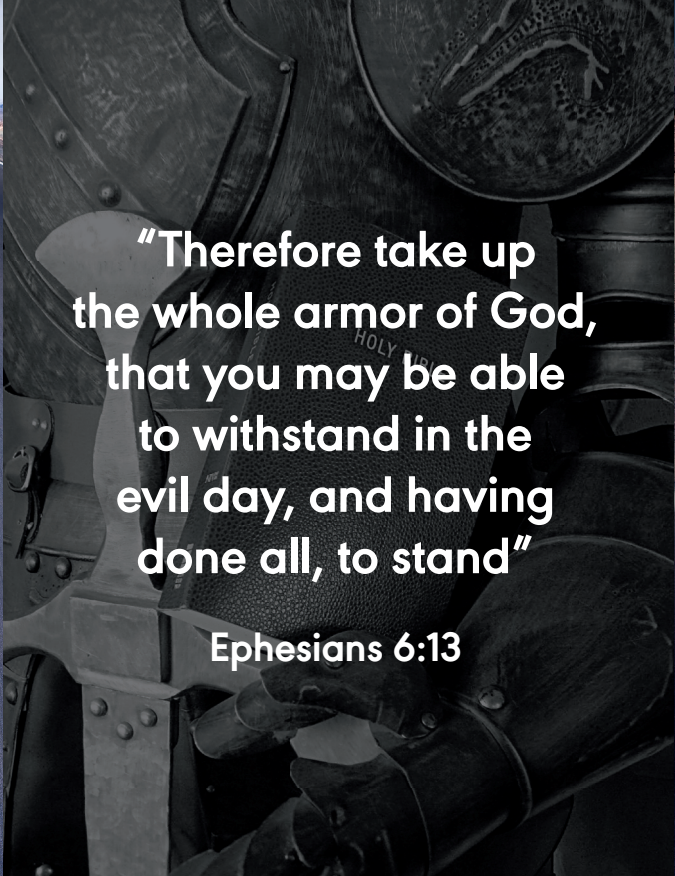
Put on! There's another aspect of being prepared for the Lord's appearing. We are not fully prepared for the dawn of the new day unless we have put on the appropriate attire: "put on the armor of light . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:12, 14).

Again, the imagery is that of a soldier who had spent the night in drunken carousing. He had stumbled home and fallen asleep in clothes that were now wrinkled and befouled with the evidence of his revelling. Day was dawning. It was time to wake up, to cast off the old clothes, and to put on something clean and polished and battle-ready. "Armor" suggests warfare, and that is fitting. Though the return of Christ is imminent, that is no warrant to forsake the battle. Scripture never suggests that His people should sit on a hillside somewhere to await His coming.

In fact, between now and His coming, we are locked in a battle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11). The nearness of our Lord's return does not mitigate the seriousness of the battle. Now is not the time to slacken our diligence, but the opposite. We should engage the battle with new vigour, knowing that the time is short. "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).

In other words, we are not off-duty soldiers, free to carouse and indulge in the fleshly pleasures of night life. We are on duty, and our Commander-in-Chief might appear at any moment. Therefore, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy" (Romans 13:13). The Christian who is not living a holy and obedient life with heavenly priorities is a Christian who does not grasp the significance of the Lord's imminent return. If we genuinely are expecting our Lord to appear at any time, that blessed hope should move us to be faithful and walk properly, lest our Lord return to find us walking improperly, disobeying, or dishonouring Him. In Christ's own words, "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:35–37).

There's more: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Romans 13:14). Again, when we are glorified, we will be instantly conformed to the image of Christ - made as much like Him as it is possible for human beings to be. Christlikeness is therefore the goal toward which God is moving us (Romans 8:29). Even now, the process of sanctification should be conforming



**"Therefore take up
the whole armor of God,
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done all, to stand"**

Ephesians 6:13

us to His image. As we grow in grace, we grow in Christlikeness. We are to become a reflection of Christ's character and His holiness. And that is what Paul means when he writes, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." We are to pursue sanctification, to follow after Christ in our conduct and character, to let His mind be in us, and to let His example guide our walk (Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21).

Paul compared his pastoral duty of discipling the Galatians to birth pains, as he sought to bring them to Christlikeness: "I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Writing to the Corinthians He also described sanctification as the process by which they would be remade in Christ's likeness: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). In other words, we progress from one level of glory to another as we progress toward the ultimate goal. So "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" is simply a command to pursue sanctification (the whole theme of Romans 12–16).

When Paul told the Galatians, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), he was in essence saying sanctification begins at conversion. From the first moment of faith, we are clothed in his righteousness. That is justification. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10).

But that is just the beginning of what it means to put on Christ. Justification is a once-for-all completed event, but sanctification is an ongoing process. And the command to "put on . . . Christ" in Romans 13 is a command to pursue the Christlikeness of sanctification.

The hope of Christ's imminent return is therefore the hinge on which a proper understanding of sanctification turns.

Let's review some of the key texts that speak of the imminence of Christ's return, and notice specifically what kind of practical duties this doctrine places on us:

- **Steadfastness:** "Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8).
- **Kindness:** "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge

is standing at the door!" (James 5:9).

- **Prayer:** "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7).

- **Faithfulness in assembling together and encouraging one another:** "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24–25).

- **Holy conduct and godliness:** "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11).

- **Purity and Christlikeness:** "When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2–3).

Those cover several broad categories, embracing every aspect of our sanctification. The hope of Christ's imminent return is a catalyst and an incentive for all these things - every fruit of the Spirit, every Christian virtue, everything that pertains to holiness and Christlikeness, and everything that belongs to life and godliness.

That is why it is so important to cultivate a watchful expectancy for the imminent coming of Christ. The point is not to make us obsessed with earthly events. In fact, if your interest in the return of Christ becomes a consuming fixation with what is happening in this world, you have utterly missed the point. The knowledge that Christ's return is imminent should turn our hearts heavenward, "from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

The source of this essay is John MacArthur's book, *The Second Coming* (Crossway).

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture Quotations are from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

* Dennis McKinsey, ed., "Imminence" in "Biblical Errancy," issue 89 (May 1990).



THE SECOND COMING

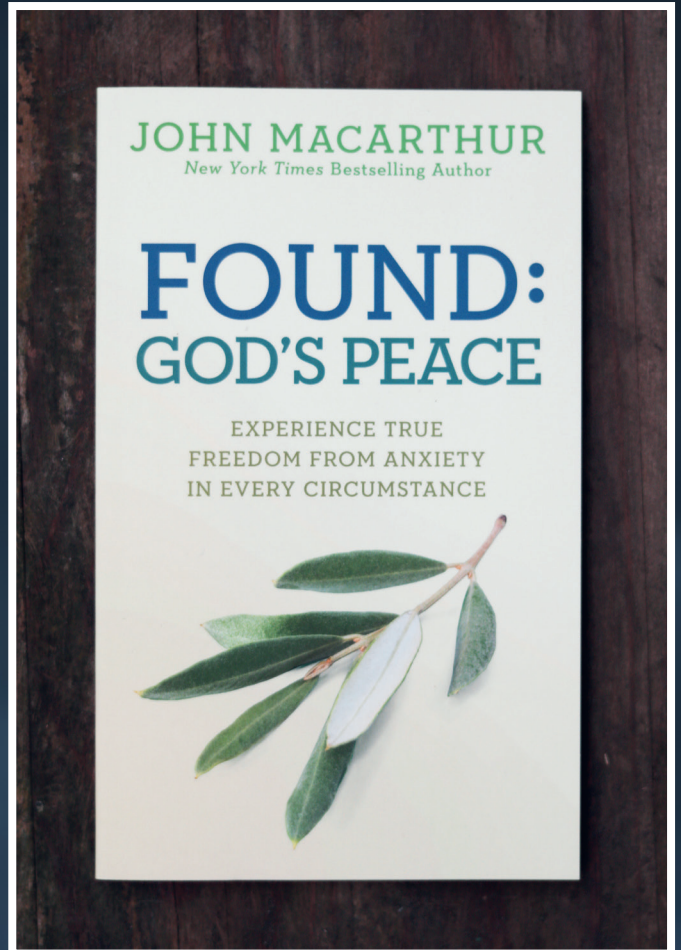
John MacArthur

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