

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, THE CHURCH LIFE, THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE, AND THE COMING OF THE LORD

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Fighting the Good Fight, Finishing the Course, and Loving the Lord's Appearing

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 4:7-8, 10; 1 Tim. 1:4, 18; 6:12; Acts 20:24; Heb. 12:1-2

- 2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.
2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
2 Tim 4:10 For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia.
1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
1 Tim 1:18 This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you might war the good warfare,
1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.
Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.
Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.

I. "I have fought the good fight"—2 Tim. 4:7a:

- A. A proper Christian life involves fighting the good fight against Satan and his kingdom of darkness and for the interests of God's kingdom—Eph. 6:10-19.
Eph 6:10 Finally, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength.
Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the stratagems of the devil,
Eph 6:12 For our wrestling is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies.
Eph 6:13 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.
Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness
Eph 6:15 And having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace;
Eph 6:16 Besides all these, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one.
Eph 6:17 And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God,
Eph 6:18 By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,
Eph 6:19 And for me, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel,
B. Paul considered the ministry a warfare for Christ, just as the priestly service was considered a military service, a warfare—2 Tim. 2:3; Num. 4:23, 30, 35.
2 Tim 2:3 Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

- Num 4:23 From thirty years old and upward to fifty years old you shall number them, everyone who enters to carry out the service to do the work in the Tent of Meeting.
- Num 4:30 From thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old you shall number them, everyone who enters into the service to do the work of the Tent of Meeting.
- Num 4:35 From thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service for work in the Tent of Meeting.
- C. “No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life”; this means that to fight the good fight for God’s interests on earth, we need to clear away all earthly entanglements—2 Tim. 2:4.
- D. Paul charged Timothy, his faithful co-worker, to fight against the differing teachings and to fight for God’s economy—1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3-4.
- 1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.
- 2 Tim 2:3 Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim 2:4 No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please the one who enlisted him.
- E. To war the good warfare is to war against the differing teachings and to carry out God’s economy according to the apostle’s ministry concerning the gospel of grace and eternal life for the glory of the blessed God—1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12.
- 1 Tim 1:18 This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you might war the good warfare,
- 1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.
- F. Whenever we minister Christ to others, we find ourselves in a battle; hence, we should be soldiers fighting for God’s interests—2 Tim. 2:3-4.
- 2 Tim 2:3 Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim 2:4 No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please the one who enlisted him.
- G. To teach and preach God’s New Testament economy concerning Christ and the church is to war the good warfare—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 5:32.
- 1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.
- Eph 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.
- H. To fight the good fight of the faith means to fight for God’s New Testament economy; in particular, it is to fight for Christ as the embodiment of God and for the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 6:12; 1:4; Col. 2:9, 19.
- 1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.
- 1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.
- Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,
- Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.
- I. We fight the good fight of the faith not only objectively but also subjectively by laying hold on the eternal life—1 Tim. 6:12.
- 1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.

II. “I have finished the course”—2 Tim. 4:7b:

- A. “I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus”—Acts 20:24:
- Paul began to run the course of the heavenly race after he was taken possession of by the Lord, and he ran continually that he might finish it—1 Cor. 9:24-26; Phil. 3:12-14.
- 1 Cor 9:24 Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold.

- 1 Cor 9:25 And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible.
- 1 Cor 9:26 I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air;
- Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
- Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
- Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.
2. It was not until the last moment of his running the race that the apostle Paul could triumphantly proclaim, “I have finished the course,” and have the assurance that he would be rewarded by the Lord at His appearing—2 Tim. 4:7-8.
- 2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- B. A proper Christian life involves running the course, the race, for the carrying out of God’s economy according to His eternal purpose—1 Cor. 9:24.
- 1 Cor 9:24 Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold.
- C. We need to seek out the journey that the Lord has ordained and faithfully walk on it, paying any price to wholeheartedly continue on our journey until we reach the end—2 Tim. 4:7.
- 2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.
- D. The journey that the Lord has ordained for us is the race that we all must run—Heb. 12:1:
- Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
1. After we are saved, God puts us into a race, which is aimed directly at the kingdom—2 Tim. 4:1b.
- 2 Tim 4:1b ... who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:
2. We cannot choose the course that we want to run; rather, we must run the race that God sets before us—Acts 20:24.
- Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.
- E. We need to “run with endurance the race which is set before us”—Heb. 12:1:
- Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
1. Like the apostle Paul, all Christians must run the race to win the prize, not salvation in the common sense but a reward in a special sense—10:35; 1 Cor. 3:14-15; 9:26-27; Phil. 3:13-14.
- Heb 10:35 Do not cast away therefore your boldness, which has great reward.
- 1 Cor 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward;
- 1 Cor 3:15 If anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.
- 1 Cor 9:26 I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air;
- 1 Cor 9:27 But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved.
- Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do:

- Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
 Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.
2. We need to run the race with endurance, suffering the opposition with endurance and never growing weary or fainting in our souls—Heb. 12:2-3.
 Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.
 Heb 12:3 For compare Him who has endured such contradiction by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary, fainting in your souls.
- F. We run the Christian race by “looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith”—v. 2:
1. Jesus is the Author of faith—the Originator, the Inaugurator, the source, and the cause of faith—v. 2:
 Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.
 - a. We need to look away unto Jesus with undivided attention by turning away from every other object—vv. 1-2; S. S. 1:4; Psa. 27:4.
 Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
 Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.
 S. S. 1:4 Draw me; we will run after you
 Psa 27:4 One thing I have asked from Jehovah; / That do I seek: / To dwell in the house of Jehovah / All the days of my life, / To behold the beauty of Jehovah, / And to inquire in His temple.
 - b. When we look away unto Jesus, He as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) transfuses us with Himself, with His believing element.
 1 Cor 15:45b ... the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.
 2. Jesus is the Perfecter of faith—the Finisher and Completer of faith—Heb. 12:2:
 Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.
 - a. As the Completer of faith, the Lord Jesus continually infuses Himself into us as the believing element and ability—Acts 7:2; Gen. 15:6.
 Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,
 Gen 15:6 And he believed Jehovah, and He accounted it to him as righteousness.
 - b. When we look away unto Him, He ministers heaven, life, and strength to us, transfusing and infusing us with all that He is so that we may be able to run the heavenly race and live the heavenly life on earth—2 Cor. 3:18.
 2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.
 - c. As we look away unto Him continually, He will finish and complete the faith that we need to run the heavenly race—Heb. 12:1-2.
 Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
 Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for

the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.

III. If the Lord's second coming is precious to us, we will love His appearing—2

Tim. 4:8:

- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- A. Loving the Lord's appearing and loving the Lord Himself are inseparable—1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8.
- 1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- B. If we are waiting for the Lord to come, we should be those who love His appearing—1 Thes. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8.
- 1 Thes 1:10 And await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath which is coming.
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- C. The Lord's appearing, His coming back, is a warning, an encouragement, and an incentive to us—vv. 1, 18:
- 2 Tim 4:1 I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:
- 2 Tim 4:18 The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me into His heavenly kingdom, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
1. We should love the Lord's appearing and look forward to it with earnest expectation and joy—Rev. 22:20.
Rev 22:20 He who testifies these things says, Yes, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
 2. We should have a living that loves the Lord's appearing; this causes us not to be discouraged but to remain faithful to the end—2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 17:14.
2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
Rev 17:14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they who are with Him, the called and chosen and faithful, will also overcome them.
- D. Loving the Lord's appearing is in contrast to loving the present age—2 Tim. 4:8, 10:
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- 2 Tim 4:10 For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia.
1. An age is a part, a section, or an aspect of the world system of Satan, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose—1 John 5:19; 2:15.
1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil one.
1 John 2:15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him;
 2. In 2 Timothy 4:10 *the present age* refers to the world that surrounds, attracts, and tempts us; we cannot contact the world unless we contact the present age of the world.
2 Tim 4:10 For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia.

3. Demas loved the present age; due to the attraction of the present age, he forsook the apostle Paul—v. 10.
 2 Tim 4:10 For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia.
4. In Romans 12:2 Paul exhorts us to not be fashioned according to this age but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind:
 - a. *This age* in verse 2 denotes the present, practical part of the world, which stands in opposition to the Body life and replaces the Body life—vv. 4-5.
 Rom 12:2 And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.
 Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,
 Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
 - b. To be fashioned according to this age means to adopt the modern fashions of the present age; to be transformed is to allow an organic element to be wrought into our being, thus producing an inward metabolic change—v. 2; 2 Cor. 3:18.
 Rom 12:2 And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.
 2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.
 - c. Because the present age opposes the church, which is God’s will, we must not be fashioned according to it—Rom. 12:2.
 Rom 12:2 And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.
 - d. If we are to live in the Body of Christ, we should not follow the present age or be fashioned according to this age or conformed to it—vv. 4-5.
 Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,
 Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
5. If we love the present age, we will take sides with the world; if we love the Lord’s appearing, we will take sides with Him and fight with Him for His interests—2 Tim. 4:1-2, 4-8, 10.
 2 Tim 4:1 I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:
 2 Tim 4:2 Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.
 2 Tim 4:4 And they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths.
 2 Tim 4:5 But you, be sober in all things, suffer evil, do the work of an evangelist, fully accomplish your ministry.
 2 Tim 4:6 For I am already being poured out, and the time of my departure is at hand.
 2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith.
 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
 2 Tim 4:10 For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia.

- E. Those who love the Lord, wait for His coming, and love His appearing will overcome—1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:20; 17:14.
- 1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- Rev 22:20 He who testifies these things says, Yes, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
- Rev 17:14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they who are with Him, the called and chosen and faithful, will also overcome them.
- F. Loving the Lord's appearing is a proof that we love the Lord and live for Him today; hence, it also becomes a condition for us to receive His reward—2 Tim. 4:8, 18.
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- 2 Tim 4:18 The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me into His heavenly kingdom, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- G. To love the Lord's appearing does not mean that we should not live a normal life; rather, the more we love His appearing, the more we need to live a normal life today—Matt. 24:40-42; 2 Thes. 1:10; 3:6-12; 1 Tim. 5:8.
- Matt 24:40 At that time two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left.
- Matt 24:41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.
- Matt 24:42 Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes.
- 2 Thes 1:10 When He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed (because our testimony to you was believed) in that day.
- 2 Thes 3:6 Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the things which were handed down to you and which you received from us.
- 2 Thes 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you;
- 2 Thes 3:8 Nor did we eat bread as a gift from anyone, but in labor and hardship we worked night and day so that we would not be burdensome to any of you;
- 2 Thes 3:9 Not because we do not have the right, but in order that we might give ourselves to you as a pattern that you might imitate us.
- 2 Thes 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this charge, that if anyone does not want to work, neither should he eat.
- 2 Thes 3:11 For we hear of some walking among you disorderly, doing no work at all, but being busybodies.
- 2 Thes 3:12 Now such ones we charge and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work with quietness and eat their own bread.
- 1 Tim 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
- H. As those who love the Lord Jesus, take Him as our life, live Him, and magnify Him, we should await His coming and love His appearing; this should be our heart's desire and our living as those who hope to enter into His joy, be saved into the Lord's heavenly kingdom, and receive the crown of righteousness—2 Tim. 4:8, 18.
- 2 Tim 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing.
- 2 Tim 4:18 The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me into His heavenly kingdom, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE INCENTIVE TO THE INOCULATOR

In this message we shall consider the incentive to the inoculator (2 Tim. 4:1-8). As we shall see, this incentive is the coming reward.

THE APOSTLE'S CHARGE

In 4:1 Paul says to Timothy, "I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." God has given all judgment to Christ because He is a man (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16). As the righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8), He will judge the living from His throne of glory at His second appearing (Matt. 25:31-46), and He will judge the dead at the great white throne after the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15).

In 2 Timothy 4:1 Paul speaks of Christ's appearing and His kingdom. Christ's appearing will be for judgment, to reward each one of us (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12), and His kingdom will be for His reigning with His overcomers (20:4, 6). By these two events the apostle charges Timothy to fulfill his ministry of the word faithfully. Here it seems that Paul is saying, "Timothy, you must realize that your life and work today have much to do with the Lord's appearing and His kingdom. At His appearing will you be praised by the Lord, or will you receive a rebuke from Him? Will you receive a reward or chastisement? Will you be considered qualified to participate in the divine kingship and reign with Christ for a thousand years, or will you be disqualified from reigning with Him? Timothy, you need to think seriously about these things. Thus, I charge you by the Lord's appearing and kingdom."

It is a matter of great significance to be charged by the Lord's appearing and kingdom. As genuine Christians, we are saved for eternity, but how are we living our Christian life, and how well are we fulfilling our Christian duty? Are we taking care of God's New Testament economy? Do we practice the proper church life, the Body life, to express God in Christ through the Spirit? These questions deserve our attention, for the way we answer them may determine our future as far as the Lord's appearing and coming kingdom are concerned. Do not listen to the superstitious and superficial teachings, which tell you that as long as you are saved, you cannot have any problems with the Lord at His coming. You may have great problems when you meet Him at the judgment seat. Every believer in Christ, every genuinely saved person, must stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged by Him, not concerning salvation or perdition but concerning reward or punishment. Because this is a solemn matter, Paul charged Timothy before God and Christ Jesus and by the Lord's appearing and kingdom.

In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul continues his charge: "Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching." The word Timothy was to proclaim included what he had learned both of Paul and of the Old Testament (3:14-15). This proves that 4:1 and 2 are a continuation of 3:14-17. In caring for a local church, especially in a time of the church's decline, the proclaiming of the word is vital.

Timothy was not merely to proclaim a word about salvation from hell to heaven. He was to speak a completing word regarding God's revelation concerning Christ and the church. Such a healthy word is the truth, the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy. Timothy was charged to be ready to proclaim this word in season and out of season. To proclaim in season and out of season means to proclaim whether the situation is opportune or inopportune, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether you are welcome or unwelcome. Furthermore, Timothy was to convict, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.... The adjective *all* modifies both *long-suffering* and *teaching*. It speaks of teaching in many aspects and directions. The carrying out of such teaching requires long-suffering.

THE TIME OF APOSTASY

Second Timothy 4:3 and 4 say, "For the time will come when they will not tolerate healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths." The time

mentioned in verse 3 refers to the time when the decline of the church becomes worse. At that time many will not tolerate healthy teaching, teaching which is healthy in life and which ministers the supply of life. Instead, they will prefer teachers who tickle the ear. This indicates that those who do not tolerate healthy teaching have an itching ear, an ear which seeks pleasing speaking for its own pleasure. Furthermore, such persons will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths. The itching ear that is turned away is the main factor of the worsening decline in the churches.

Many Christians today do not tolerate the healthy teachings related to God's economy. When we teach that Christ is the God-man, the One who is the embodiment of God as His expression, some accuse us of blasphemy or heresy. Some have even gone so far as to twist our words concerning Christ as the God-man and, in print, to falsely accuse us of teaching that Christ was neither quite God nor quite man. In *The Four Major Steps of Christ* I say, "We know that Christ is God incarnated as a man. Christ is the God-man. He is not only a man of God; He is also a God-man. Therefore, the incarnation of Christ simply means the mingling of God with humanity" (p. 6). Twisting our words and grossly misrepresenting us, certain of our opposers have written, "This incarnate deity was neither quite God nor quite man; He was a third thing, a mingled God-man." We believe that because Christ is true God and true man, He is the God-man. He is the perfect God and a complete man as well. Both His divine nature and His human nature, each being complete, concur in His one person—without separation, without confusion, and without being changed into a third nature. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, one person with two natures, is worthy to receive our worship and praise forever.

Because many Christians today will not tolerate healthy teaching, they heap up teachers to tickle their itching ears. The teachings in the Lord's recovery are altogether different. Our teachings do not tickle the ear. Instead, they may operate on the ears of those who hear. Unable to bear such an operation, some turn their ears away from the truth.

We have pointed out again and again that in 1 and 2 Timothy *truth* refers to the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy. This reality consists primarily of Christ as the embodiment of God and of the church as the Body of Christ. Instead of listening to proper teachings concerning Christ and the church, many Christians have turned aside to other things.

TIMOTHY, THE INOCULATOR

In 2 Timothy 4:5 Paul says to Timothy, "But you, be sober in all things, suffer evil, do the work of an evangelist, fully accomplish your ministry." For Timothy to fully accomplish his ministry was for him to fill up the full measure of his ministry. This ministry denotes the ministry of the word to minister Christ in all His riches (Eph. 3:8) to both sinners and believers for the building up of the Body of Christ (4:11-12). Such a ministry is desperately needed to counter the declining trend, as prophesied in 2 Timothy 4:3 and 4.

PAUL, THE PATTERN

In verses 6 and 7 Paul testifies concerning himself: "For I am already being poured out, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith." In verse 6 Paul indicates that he was already being poured out as a drink offering. The drink offering was additional to the basic offerings revealed in Leviticus 1 through 7 (Num. 15:1-10; 28:7-10). The basic offerings were types of various aspects of Christ. The drink offering was a type of Christ as enjoyed by His offerer, an enjoyment that filled him with Christ as the heavenly wine and even made him wine to God. The apostle Paul became such a drink offering by so enjoying Christ that he could be poured out by the actual shedding of his blood. To be poured out here means to shed one's blood. *Already being poured out* indicates that the process of being offered as a drink offering had begun.

Paul could say that the time of his departure was at hand. This refers to his departure from the world to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:23) through martyrdom. Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice. The

first imprisonment, about A.D. 62-64, was due to the Jews' accusation (Acts 28:17-20). During that time he wrote the Epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and Philemon. After his release (which he expected in Philippians 1:25; 2:24; and Philemon 22) from the first imprisonment, he must have visited Ephesus and Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), where he probably wrote the first Epistle to Timothy. Then he visited Crete (Titus 1:5); Nicopolis (3:12), where he wrote the Epistle to Titus; Troas; and Miletus (2 Tim. 4:13, 20), where he probably wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. Due to Caesar Nero's sudden persecution, Paul was imprisoned a second time, about A.D. 65. At that time he wrote the second Epistle to Timothy while expecting his imminent martyrdom for his Master.

In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul mentions three items: fighting the good fight, finishing the course, and keeping the faith. A proper Christian life is threefold. It involves fighting the good fight against Satan and his kingdom of darkness for the interests of God's kingdom (1 Tim. 6:12), running the course for the carrying out of God's economy according to His eternal purpose (Heb. 12:1), and keeping the faith for participation in the divine riches in God's dispensation (Gal. 3:22). In this Paul set up an adequate pattern for us.

Paul began to run the course of the heavenly race after he was taken possession of by the Lord, and he continually ran (1 Cor. 9:24-26; Phil. 3:12-14) that he might finish it (Acts 20:24). Now at the end he triumphantly proclaimed, "I have finished the course." For this he will receive from the Lord a reward—the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8).

Paul could testify that he had kept the faith. This means that he kept God's New Testament economy. To keep the faith is to keep the entire New Testament economy of God—the faith concerning Christ as the embodiment of God and the mystery of God and the church as the Body of Christ and the mystery of Christ.

THE REWARD—THE INCENTIVE

Verse 8 says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing." The crown is a symbol of glory given as a prize, in addition to the Lord's salvation, to the triumphant runner of the race (1 Cor. 9:25). This prize is neither of grace nor by faith, as salvation is (Eph. 2:5, 8-9), but of righteousness through works (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Such a reward will be awarded the believers not according to the grace of the Lord but according to His righteousness. Hence, it is the crown of righteousness. The One who awards it is the Lord as the righteous Judge, not as the merciful God or the gracious Redeemer. Paul was assured that such a prize was reserved, laid up, for him and would be awarded to him at the day of the Lord's second appearing.

Paul says that such an award will be given to all who love the Lord's appearing. The Lord's appearing, His coming back, is a warning, an encouragement, and an incentive to us. We should love it and look forward to it with earnest expectation and joy. By it, the apostle charged Timothy to fulfill his ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-2, 5).

The crown of righteousness of which Paul was assured is the incentive to the inoculator. If we are faithful to the healthy word of the truth and if we are faithful inoculators to dispense the ingredients of the divine inoculation into Christians today that they may return to the full knowledge of the truth, this reward will be given to us at the time of the Lord's appearing. This means that if we are faithful to the Lord's ministry, we shall receive the crown of righteousness as our reward.

There is a great deal of talk among Christians today concerning the Lord's second coming. But not many believers realize that when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will not come as the merciful God or as the gracious Savior but as the righteous Judge. Christians should be warned and encouraged to prepare themselves to stand before this Judge. I hope that many among us will take up the burden in this dark age to bring such a solemn charge to the Lord's people. We all need to receive this charge before God and before the Lord Jesus, the One who will judge the living and the dead. We must

declare the fact that when the Lord comes back, He will be the Judge of all, both believers and unbelievers. According to Matthew 25, all of the Lord's servants will have to give an account to Him. The Lord will either say, "Well done, good and faithful slave" (v. 21), or, "Evil and slothful slave" (v. 26). In His righteousness the Lord will decide whether or not we receive a reward.

Because the Lord's coming and His kingdom are solemn matters, Paul gave a serious charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-8. We should not think that the Lord's appearing will merely be a time of rapture and excitement. It will also be a time of great solemnity for every believer in Christ. This was the reason Paul charged Timothy by the Lord's appearing and His kingdom. May we all give heed to this solemn warning. (*Life-study of 2 Timothy*, pp. 57-63)