

David Ahlgren – January 16, 2014
Statement of Faith Article #9, Christ's Return

Statement of Faith Article 9 discusses Christ's return, which means that our Lord Jesus Christ will come back in bodily form in a premillennial manner. Matthew 24:30 says, "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Certainly this does not mean that He will just float in slowly on clouds, as Jesus told us He will come quickly as lightning flashing across the sky (Lk.17:24). Also in Acts 1:11 two angels told the disciples that Jesus would return just as He ascended to heaven in front of them – this implies that He will come in a body just as at the ascension, just as when He left in a glorified body after the resurrection.

We see in the first ten verses of Revelation 20 part of the sequence of events at the end of time for Jesus' return. God's angel binds Satan for 1,000 years (a millennium), seals him in a pit for that length of time, then releases him on the earth "for a little while." During the millennium, those who had been martyred for Christ come to life and reign with Him until the 1,000 years are up, after which the others will be resurrected. So Christ returns the first time before this millennial period, "pre-millennial." The rest of the millennium discussion is for another time, but the important thing to note here is Jesus' premillennial return for the scope of this statement of faith. So we are to wait "for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," (Titus 2:13). This absolutely does not mean we are to lounge around looking at the signs for His return and do nothing, for the prior verse tells us, "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" as we wait eagerly for His return. Sanctification and living as He showed us are what a godly life entails, becoming holy and making disciples of all nations until that day. Those who reject Christ (2 Thess.1:6-8), who do not know God and do not obey the gospel, will suffer God's vengeance, so Jesus' return will not be acknowledged nor anticipated by them.

Both Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 reveal that only God the Father knows the time Jesus will return. Acts 1:7 says, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." So the mystery stands with only signs of the times for the general way of the world before Jesus returns, and we are to keep watch and be on guard as well, echoing Titus

2:12. Even Romans 13:11-14 spells out our need to wake up, stop sinful works of darkness, and “and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” He must find us living right, living for Him, and not walking in the darkness of sin – He will return when we least expect it, and we will have no time to get right at the last minute. Looking 2 Peter 3:11, this includes living in holiness and godliness. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 we find additional things we should do and not do – faith, love, and hope are crucial to this effort, and we should also encourage and comfort each other as we struggle with the world and our own sinful failures.

So this blessed hope (as Titus 2:13 calls it) should motivate us to live godly, serve sacrificially, and energetically pursue His mission to make disciples by the Gospel. As 2 Timothy 4:8 shows, we must fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. Paul summed this up in his own life in Philippians 3:12-14, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Because Jesus will return, and for all He has done for us and has planned for us to do (Eph. 2:10), we need to run the race for all it is worth, not dwelling on the past, sidelined from the race by sin, nor resting on our laurels, but looking upward for His glory in our lives. This blessed hope should metamorph our minds to become like Jesus in all we think, live for, and work towards. As Hebrews 9: 28 brings out, “so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Because Jesus will return, based on what He did to take away our sin, we should be eagerly awaiting Him as we work out our sanctification, our salvation, with fear and trembling. Because we have been predestined to become conformed to the image of God’s son, we must purify ourselves as He is pure (“be holy, for I am holy”).

This article that states we believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ and that the coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, requires constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, should motivate to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission. These and other verses are the basis, and this is a constant reminder to me that I am bought at such a price with a certain eternal hope that is proven by the resurrection and promise in my Lord Jesus Christ’s return to gather us to Himself. Even so, Lord, come quickly!