

Let's be honest, there's a whole lot of stuff that we don't know or that we can't be sure about. But at the risk of seeming bumptious, let me spell out one thing from a list of things that we Christians do know and that we can be sure about. We know that the world is not destined to peter out slowly but is accelerating towards a climax. And we know that that climax will not be a big bang followed by oblivion. For we know that that climax will be marked by Christ's return to earth, and how different that coming will be from his first appearance – no obscurity, no small town, no stable, no manger this time. For we know that he will come in glory, accompanied by an army of dazzling angels and radiant people of God – and among them will be all the great names of those who have died before his coming.

When that moment comes we cannot appear shabby and ill-prepared. That day demands a lifetime's preparation, beginning now! So how do we prepare, how do we get ready, for Christ's return?

### **By being strong in faith**

The key here is living, daily contact with God. For we're not on about superhuman effort or New Year's resolutions or stoicism. No, when we are in living, daily contact with God, we get to know him better, we discover just how faithful he is, we prove that he can be counted on. This doesn't mean that our prayers will always be answered the way we would like and it doesn't mean that sad, bad things will never happen to us. But it does mean that he will be there with us and for us in our darkest days and give us the strength to come through them; it does mean that he loves us with a love which will never be broken and will never run out, a love from which nothing can cut us off. We discover forgiveness, peace, joy and hope. In other words, we find someone we can trust absolutely and know personally and it's that trust and knowledge that make our faith grow.

So let's be in living, daily contact with God and so be strong in faith.

### **By loving one another**

Every local church is called to be a caring community. Its love must be unconditional and inclusive, embracing all and giving no one the cold shoulder. There is no room for losing patience, no room for envy or pride, selfishness or irritability and we must spare no effort to demonstrate kindness, to forgive, to rejoice in the truth, to protect, and to build up trust and hope and love. Gossip and bickering are deadly diseases which attack love and readily infect any church – it can be shown in a thousand-and-one ways. If we fail at this point, we cannot expect to make any impact on those who don't know Jesus.

The love Paul is on about here is no human emotion or superhuman feeling but that divine love which floods the hearts of those who are in living, daily contact with God. And it's a quality of love that is never merely words – it proves itself in action.

So let's be in living, daily contact with God and so love one another with the love that he gives.

### **By keeping ourselves pure and innocent**

When Jesus returns, all the faults will be removed and every scar left by sin will disappear. Then we shall conform exactly to God's design pattern and perfect standard. There will be no unfinished areas or rough edges. Each of us will stand as his masterpiece.

In the meantime, we are called to live pure and innocent lives. And once again the key is living, daily contact with God. For what we need isn't a spiritual facelift or turning over a new leaf, but a radical transformation. And when we are in living, daily contact with God, we find that radical transformation as he changes us from the inside out, pours his love and goodness in and renews our minds and hearts. He is at work on our lives, making us pure and innocent on the inside which shows itself in pure and innocent lives. In this way we will live out Christian counter-culture in stark contrast to the culture of this world where anything goes and people do their own thing, where it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something, where there are no moral absolutes.

So let's be in living, daily contact with God and so be enabled to live pure and innocent lives.

And let's remember being strong in faith, loving one another and keeping pure and innocent are part of this lifetime's preparation. In this way we will be ready whenever Jesus returns – and unworried and unafraid.