

To "... strengthen the things which remain..." Revelation 3:2

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The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, pt 2

F. B. Hole ("Library of F. B. Hole")

But let us now turn to some questions frequently raised in connection with this subject.

What is the exact meaning of verbal inspiration, now so often derided even by professed ministers of the gospel; and do you believe in it?

The exact meaning is: Inspiration of such fulness that it extends to the control of the very words of the utterance or writing. Verbal is an adjective derived from the Latin *verbum* = a word. There are those who will allow a modified inspiration, extending as far as the *thoughts* are concerned; an inspiration differing in degree but hardly in kind from that state of mental exaltation and rapture which produced the finest passages from Shakespeare, Milton, or Dante.

We have to observe, however, first, that Scripture definitely makes its inspiration a matter of its *words* (1 Corinthians 2:13; Revelation 1:3, Revelation 22:18-19), and, second, that an inspiration such as suggested extending only to the thoughts would be useless, as far as giving us authoritative Scriptures is concerned. To assure us that Paul and Peter and John had wonderful ideas given of God, but that they were, left without any divine guidance when it came to be a question of expressing those ideas for the benefit of others, is to take away with the left hand what is offered by the right.

You and I have no means of getting at those wonderful thoughts in Paul's mind save by the *words* in which he clothed them. The difficulty of putting the simplest and lowest thought into proper and adequate words is notorious, and without inspired words we have nothing inspired at all, whatever Paul may have had. To put it in another way: if we have not Scriptures verbally inspired we have no inspired Scriptures at all, and the Bible, though interesting and elevating, would not be AUTHORITATIVE. It is exactly this *authority* which the modern false teacher is out to destroy.

For ourselves it is enough that the Bible claims verbal inspiration for itself. We believe it.

What theory do you hold as to how verbal inspiration became effective; how did it work?

Quite a number of theories have been formed, but we hold none of them. We should no more think of forming a theory as to the exact working of inspiration than we should think of forming a theory as to other great mysteries of the faith, such as the truth of one God yet a Trinity of Persons, or the exact working of God's creatorial power in bringing worlds into being, or the exact mode in which the incarnation of our blessed Lord and Saviour became an accomplished fact. Instead, we admit frankly and at once that here are these great truths clearly

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revealed in Scripture, yet wholly supernatural and beyond our understanding. We do not expect to understand them; we accept them in faith. We are not troubled by finding these mysteries totally beyond our comprehension, but rather confirmed. It is what we expect in a revelation which is divine. Did everything in Christianity fall within the compass of our minds — which, though renewed through grace, are still human — we should at once know it to be human in its origin. And this it is not; it is superhuman: it is of God.

What have you to say as to the continual accusations of inaccuracy and mistakes which are leveled at the Bible?

Just this: that if all the accusations ever brought could be collected together and classified we believe that a substantial majority would fall under the head of accusations founded upon sheer ignorance, intensified often by an admixture of cunning dishonesty. The favorite infidel question as to Cain's wife is an example of this large class. Such difficulties exist not in the Scriptures but purely in the minds of the people who raise them.

Setting aside all these, we believe that of the residue, a great majority again would prove to be genuine difficulties, but of a sort that careful and prayerful research gradually resolve into most instructive helps, often displaying much hidden beauty.

An example of this class is the statement about the fourteen generations in Matthew 1:17. But we discover that the fourteen generations from David to the captivity is reached by omitting the names of the kings more immediately descended from the wicked Athaliah, the daughter of the yet more infamous Jezebel. Their names to the third generation are kept out of the genealogy. Thus the apparent error is found to be due to the fact that God's thoughts and ways and reckonings are not ours. If apostasy supervenes He does not count the generations affected by it.

A very small number of difficulties now remain to form the third class, which is composed of little discrepancies, the source of which cannot be discovered with certainty. An example of this class is the question of the age of Ahaziah when he came to the throne of

Judah. 2 Kings:26 states it as 22, while 2 Chronicles 22:2 says 42. The error evidently crept in through a very early mistake in copying, but when and how we have no means of knowing.

The fact is, then, that most of these so-called mistakes are apparent only and not real, and the very few real ones are copyists' slips and the like on side matters of no vital importance.

Is it possible to maintain the inspiration of our Authorized version since a Revision has been issued as well as many other translations in English?

We do not maintain the inspiration of the Authorized or any other version and never have. What we do maintain is as follows: —

1. That the Scriptures, as written in their original tongues, were given by inspiration of God, that inspiration extending to the words employed.
2. That by means of the large number of ancient manuscript copies of the Scriptures preserved to us in the providence of God, we possess a very accurate knowledge of the Scriptures as originally written, the words or passages as to which any doubt exists being very few and unimportant.
3. That the Authorized translation is on the whole very good and faithful in its rendering of the inspired original, but that it may be usefully compared with the Revised Version, and more especially with the New Translation by the late Mr. J. N. Darby, to ensure even greater accuracy. Substantially, however, it gives us the inspired Word of God in trustworthy form.

What about the Revised Version of 2 Timothy 3:16 — "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable" — Is that correct?

Pretty clearly it is not correct. In the original Greek the verb "is" does not occur at all, being understood, but not expressed. In English we must express it, and the question is as to where it should be inserted. There are eight other passages of similar construction in the New Testament, and each of these has been translated by the Revisers as in the Authorized Version. Only in 2Ti_3:16 have they twisted the sentence round in this way. One of these eight

Scriptures is Hebrews 4:13. If we translated that according to the Reviser's rendering of our verse it would read: "All things that are naked are also opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," which on the face of it would be absurd. Indeed, the Scripture in Timothy looks foolish as translated by the Revisers, inasmuch as they turn it into a statement of the perfectly self-evident truth that every God-breathed writing is good. *That* Timothy well knew; the assurance he needed in view of the apostles' departure was that "ALL scripture is God-breathed."

How do you account for the fact that the sayings of evil men have a place in the Bible; are these inspired?

By no means. It is easy, however, to account for them. The explanation lies in the difference between *revelation* and *inspiration*. Not all Scripture is direct revelation from God. Some of it is history in which the sayings of evil men and even of Satan are recorded. Again, a book like Ecclesiastes is largely the record of Solomon's thoughts and reasonings and disillusionments while seeking happiness in the gratification of his natural desires. Yet all is given to us by inspiration of God. We have divinely accurate accounts of what was done or said; and Solomon is led to record his mental struggles with such divine fitness as to be profitable for our warning and correction.

If an illustration of this be needed, turn to Ecclesiastes 2:24: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour." Is this a *revelation* from God? Is it God's voice telling us that food and drink are, after all, the highest good? Emphatically No! What, then? It is the divinely inspired record of the extreme folly to which the wisest of men may be led if he have no light above his natural reason and observation! — and how good of God to give us a peep at this in His inspired record.

Some people like just to open the Bible and take the first verse their eye falls upon as a direct message from God to them. Is this a right procedure?

Hardly. We are quite willing to believe that

there have been occasions when people have in that way lighted on remarkable verses that have come to them with much point, yet any such haphazard method practiced in a habitual way is unworthy of the inspired Word of God.

It is written not for the lazy, but for diligent searchers for truth and guidance like the Berean Jews (Acts 17), who read it in faith and dependence on God. Only thus do we, "rightly divide" (2 Timothy 2:15) its contents and obtain light and wisdom from God.

It is human to stand with the crowd, it is divine to stand alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; it is God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide.

Deacons, pt. 2

Joel Portman

Qualifications of 1 Timothy 3

Notice first of all that the deacons in this passage are directly linked with the overseers, or the elderhood. In this sense, it might be noted that they likely are those who labor with the elders in the responsible care of the assembly. One represents spiritual pastoring, or shepherding, care, while the other represents spiritual ministry, or service, to the saints. So these are the individuals who function in their own spiritual capacity and charge as the active arm of the church ministry to uphold and enable the saints in their collective functions for the Lord.

The qualifications are very high, almost the same in certain areas as that required of the elders.

Likewise, or, "in like manner" indicates that these are similar to the elder with respect to the high standards that God expects. With these high standards, there were would corresponding care needed to discern them.

Nine Qualifications are Listed

1. Grave indicates that they inspire awe, respect, and they are venerable and recognized

for their qualities. In Philippians 4:8, it is translated "honest." This means that he has a serious bearing that causes his ministry to have weight among those who hear him. It is more than an outward appearance, but it is his character that his life manifests before others.

2. Not double-tongued or inconsistent in speech. It is only found here in the New Testament. It implies not speaking to cater to individuals, saying one thing to one person and another thing to another. It implies righteousness in speech, dependability.

3. Not Given to much Wine, or temperate, having physical desires under control. In an environment where wine was a normal aspect of drink, (and was usually diluted), he was not known to be one to linger over or be one to drink much. There are examples in Scripture that show the dangers in judgment that can result from this. It could also indicate, in a broader sense, that he is not a man who is given to appetite, or any self-indulgence in his life.

4. Not Greedy of Money. This is a quality required in an elder also, meaning that he is not ambitious of monetary gain, occupied with materialism and all that is associated with it. He may have money, but be greedy of money, or not covetous. He is not a "money-lover."

5. Clear in Doctrine with

a. A consistent life that supports genuine convictions. He needs to have a life that supports the truth he teaches, showing that he is genuine to hold fast the truth in his own life. His conscience is pure, undefiled by any knowledge that he is not practicing what he preaches.

b. Steadfast adherence to the truth of God's Word. If teaching, his teaching must be consistent with the truth of God and dependable. In this regard, he must have studied and learned the truth, be able to handle it properly, and showing some understanding so that it might be profitable to his hearers.

6. Proven or tested by various functions of lesser importance, and shown to be faithful by previous conditions of his life.

7. Found Blameless, or without ground for any charge against them by others. Inconsistencies of any importance in one's life would hinder the effectiveness of ministry and dependability in practical functions to the assembly.

This doesn't mean that he is perfect! However, it does mean more than just being cleared of charges; it is that no charge has been made against him that is valid.

8. Husband of one Wife, or, as elders, devoted and involved with only one woman in his life. Not philanderer or flirtatious person, but faithful to only one woman, who is his wife. Does not necessarily mean that he is married, though the language of v. 11 seems to indicate so (if the expression in that verse means their wives, as we read it in the A.V.). (Many commentators hold that if 1 Timothy 5:9 means that she is married only once, the same holds true here, but there is a difference of opinion.)

That, along with the following qualifications, "ruling their children and their own houses well," seems to indicate that he is a married man, though there are differences of opinion on that issue. It indicates that he gives evidence of an ability to exemplify Christian standards and lead properly in his own family, maintaining order so that his own testimony is evident and positive.

(Verse 11 intervenes, and it has different interpretations among many brethren. Some think that it refers to women deacons, but that is relatively hard to support from the substance of the text as well as from the pattern of the early church. Phoebe might be mentioned in this regard, but exactly what her function was in the assembly and what type of work she maintained is hard to say. She may be seen as a servant of the assembly more in the general sense, as is already observed.)

Spiritual qualifications and the position of the verse in the passage along with its wording seem to indicate clearly that Paul is referring to the wives of deacons. If this is true, then it indicates that such men must have wives who reflect their own spiritual qualities and who are suitable companions to help them in their work. This would be particularly true if, and likely so, they would assist their husbands in any minis-

try involving sisters of the assembly.

But it is also indicating that the respect and weight of a deacon's ministry would have its link with the demeanor and spiritual quality of his own wife. A lack of this would be a hindrance to his ability to function properly and effectively in the work of the Lord in the local assembly.

Work of a Deacon

1 Timothy 3:8, "the deacons" is literally, "those who serve." They would correspond to the Levites, who assisted the priests in their service in the holy place and toward the people. This service has various aspects, but it must be seen as any sphere of particular service that carries with it any responsibility or representative capacity.

It would involve

1. Handling of assembly funds for the assembly
2. Writing letters on behalf of the assembly. This is not necessarily "elder work."
3. Serving the saints in their needs as one might represent the assembly in its service toward the needy.
4. Ministry of the Word in teaching the saints
5. Teaching Sunday School classes, as this represents a capacity of the assembly to teach the young.
6. Preaching the gospel might also come under this list, though this is not necessarily an assembly function and is more in the area of evangelistic qualifications
7. Public service for the assembly, such as handing out books and greeting people at the door, a function that represents the assembly in his testimony and service.

One conclusion seems to be that there are areas of assembly service that are not under the definition of "deacon work." There are areas of work and involvement that can include every believer in fellowship in the assembly, so that there is a sphere of service for all to be occupied in.

Not all qualify for what might be strictly called Deacon work. Each one of the Lord's people should be exercised to function in whatever capacity they are qualified for and can be recognized in. We often want some "higher level" of service, but are not willing to assist the Lord's people in what might not call for as much

recognition.

Matters that Concern

1. Opening up areas of what is truly deacon work to those who are not qualified spiritually and scripturally only lowers the standard for such work. When such work that requires spiritual qualifications is done by those who are not exercised to maintain and display what is necessary according to Scripture, that work does not have the effect and result that it should have, and it is "cheapened" in that way.

This is not intended to discourage saints from such forms of service, but rather to challenge us with relation to upholding it and strengthening the standard for it. We can fail to be exercised to the extent that the result is a continual decline that accommodates itself to the point of accepting as normal what is actually abnormal! The result is a further decline that inevitably results in ruin of a local assembly.

2. Calling simple service in physical tasks about the hall "deacon work" takes away from what that work should involve. If this is deacon work, then only deacons should be involved in doing it. However, we have seen that there is a work that can be done by every believer and in which all should be involved.

The purpose of this consideration is to stir our hearts, especially those of the younger believers, to recognize the high standards that God expects for spiritual service so that we might seek to develop and to display those qualities that will make our service effective to the saints and for the Lord, and which will preserve the character of the assembly.

We must remember what has been taught us in the past: the platform of the assembly or any other teaching function, is not open to every person. Neither is it restricted to only a small class of individuals. It is the responsibility of elders to maintain the standards for such spiritual service by their example and teaching so that the character and quality of the assembly might be strengthened and preserved in a degenerating world.

If you are keeping the body under control, you will find it the very servant it ought to be. But if you are allowing the body to have whatever it wants, truly you will find it the most tyrannical of masters.

Diotrephes

Larry Steers

In a previous article we considered Gaius as a DEVOTED believer who was facing difficult and trying circumstances, and Demetrius as a DEPENDABLE brother. In this article we will look at what the Holy Spirit has revealed about Diotrephes in the Divinely inspired record. He is presented to the reader as a DOMINEERING and DANGEROUS man. The words John records relative to this man are some of the most sober that came from the heart of the writer. While John expresses his deep concern, the Holy Spirit directs the thoughts of John that flow from his pen. These are solemn truths for us to glean and learn from.

It may be a perplexity for us today to understand how any man could usurp for himself the power and forcefulness that Diotrephes possessed. Let us appreciate and value highly that God has demanded a plurality of elders in a local assembly. These men must work harmoniously together as they pray for and guide the little flock for which they are responsible to God. Not one of them should be the dominate overseer demanding the activities of the assembly be conducted "his way". When scriptural order prevails this will not be allowed to happen.

It appears very evident that Diotrephes was not born again. Note, and significantly, when he was born his parents were likely idolaters. This is indicated when they named their son after the Greek god Zeus. Diotrephes' name has two parts: "DIOS", which means "of Zeus", and "TREPHO" which has the meaning "to nourish". To his parents he was "nourished of Zeus". It seems generally to have been the custom after idolaters were saved, and their names were associated with one of the gods, to adopt a name far removed from any association with idolatry. Diotrephes did not divorce his name from idolatry.

Second, notice that the Holy Spirit makes it crystal clear that this domineering man had no interest, concern or exercise for the spiritual health of the believers. He obstinately suppressed John's letter to the church (v.9). Jeremiah describes a man of this ilk, "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and

scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:1).

This raises two very solemn questions. First: how and why was Diotrephes received into the fellowship of the local assembly? But second, how did he rise to a place of leadership and become so powerful?

As to the first question it would certainly cause carefulness regarding reception. Some seem to be satisfied to hear a person say they are saved and to sing "Happy Day", but there is far more to being saved than words. Recently the writer, sitting with another servant of the Lord, had the opportunity to hear a woman tell us how she was saved. She had told others that she had been saved and they accepted her as a Christian. She told the two of us a very long story. However we felt strongly that two vital things were missing. She made no mention of sin and gave no indication of the value of the death of Christ. Over the following weeks there has been no evidence of a changed life. Evidence of real repentance towards God is essential and real living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must be clearly manifest in the life.

As to the second question, a man is recognized for the work he is already involved in. One should never be asked to participate in oversight work who is not clearly engaged in that great work. A brother who expressed a desire to be an elder was challenged, "what does an elder do that you cannot do?" The great work of encouraging, visitation, and ministering good healthy spiritual food is essential. There should have been a clear indication in the life of Diotrephes of his love for the saints. Spiritual discernment would have detected something out of order.

The writer realizes that the Lord chose Judas to accompany Him as one of the twelve. But we also believe that our Lord made no mistakes and that in Judas the purposes of God were being worked out. But as indicated above there are scriptural principles to guide brethren in the recognition of elders.

Diotrephes lusted for a position of power. John writes concerning this man "who loveth to have the preeminence among them" (v.9). He strove for the chief place. He longed to be first. How very sad when mortal man wants the place reserved exclusively for the Lord. Paul reminds us "that in all things He might have the preem-

inence" (Colossians 1:18). But in contrast to Diotrephes our Lord was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). How it must have grieved the Lord to hear a reasoning among His disciples "which of them should be the greatest" (Luke 9:46). Again, when the Lord had introduced His supper "there was a strife among them which of them should be the greatest" (Luke 22:24). How this must have touched the tender heart of the Lord.

How true are the words of another:

"It takes more grace than I can tell

To play the second fiddle well".

When the position of Diotrephes was threatened, he reacted. He refused to receive John (v.9) and other servants of Christ. Note "us" in verse 9 "receiveth us not" is plural.

When John writes "if I come" (v.10), "if", is not the "if" of doubt but an expression of the exercise of John. He is an aged brother and travel in those days was hard. However there is a resolve in the words "I will remember his deeds" (v.10) and embraces the certainty of recompense. The deeds of an evil man have wounded the saints, caused broken spirits and suffering. The behaviour of a man with an uncontrolled tongue is clearly identified as "prating against us with malicious words" (v. 10). "Prating" is phluarpeo and means to level false accusations, here, against an honored servant of Christ. The word is found only here in the New Testament. Solomon writes "a prating fool shall fall" (Proverbs 10: 8, 10). These slanderous attacks are called malicious (poneros- evil).

Diotrephes was not content (arikeo=not sufficient, not enough, not satisfied) with railing against John, but extended his vociferous attacks against others. He refused to receive the brethren and when others would, Diotrephes cast them out of the church. The hospitality and love of a devoted Gaius did not lie in the heart of Diotrephes.

When John concludes this brief section (verses 9 to 10), he addresses the saints as "beloved". The reference to "evil" (v. 11) is a reference to Diotrephes whose heart was void of doing good. When John writes "he that doeth evil hath not seen God" the indication is clear that John was convinced that Diotrephes was not born again.

Yes, these are solemn words. Yet they are Divinely inspired for our learning. While we are convinced that Diotrephes was a stranger to the saving grace of God, we must walk carefully, scripturally and humbly before God lest the spirit of Diotrephes should be manifest in any degree amongst us. No man is chief amongst the brethren.

While it is not our purpose just here to consider assembly discipline notice again the violations of Diotrephes as already indicated. To throw a believer out of the church to get rid of them is totally unknown in the New Testament. But also the implication is clear that Diotrephes had no intention of seeing those whom he "threw" out received back to assembly fellowship. Brethren, if we have closed our mind to restoration of those put away we are on very unscriptural ground. How could God really bless an assembly taking this stand?

We will now turn briefly to a brighter, more encouraging truth in the midst of a very dark scene.

We suggested in the first article that Demetrius (v. 12), (not the same man as the smith of Ephesus) was a **DEPENDABLE BROTHER**. Any assembly would be greatly blessed with brethren in the fellowship like this brother. The Holy Spirit commends the testimony of Demetrius in a three fold way

Firstly, he had a "good report" (v. 12), of "all men". One of the essential qualifications of an elder is "he must have a good report of them which are without" (1Timothy 3:7). Demetrius would bring no reproach upon the assembly. His words, work, and manner of life would be respected by those not in the assembly. Such a testimony would fulfil the word of God, "many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40:3). But "all men" would include the believers. Like Gaius, Demetrius would pour comforting words of instruction and encouragement into the hearts of those so badly treated by Diotrephes.

Secondly we are told the Demetrius also had a good report "of the truth itself" (v. 12). John has already reminded us "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (v. 4).

And thirdly, he receives a high commendation from the aged apostle for John writes

"we also bear record" (v. 12). Likely addressing Gaius to whom John is writing, he states "Ye know that our record is true" (v. 12).

Do we not learn a very valuable lesson here? While conditions in an assembly may drift into unscriptural ways and carnal men rise to oversight for which they are not qualified, it is possible for individual believers to live for Christ as Gaius and Demetrius did. Even though Diotrophes inflicted his ruthless ways upon an assembly, two men bore a consistent testimony. We have all the resources needed to be overcomers. Peter reminds us that we have been given "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). The overcomer in Revelation 2 and 3 rises above the problems, worldliness, and departure in each of the seven assemblies. In such circumstances a believer can bear a bright testimony for the Lord in a dark day.

Notice John, whom we have called a DIPLOMATIC MAN (v. 13,14).

John has many things to write. How many times while reading the writings of this apostle which the Holy Spirit directed him to write do we long that he could have continued. At the conclusion of his Gospel we read "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." (John 21:2).

Here he brings his brief letter to a conclusion perhaps for at least two reasons.

Firstly he does not want his words to reach the ears of Diotrophes which could make desperate circumstances more difficult for the suffering saints.

But secondly it is far better to speak face to face (lit. mouth to mouth). When an issue rises today it is easier to send a letter or an e-mail. But the modern methods allow for little discussion.

John concludes with what, in view of the epistle, could be a prayer for "peace". This would embrace harmonious relationships between brethren, a peace which binds together.

This epistle closes with a word which speaks, "peace". He refers to the believers where Gaius is with the words "Greet the friends by name" (v. 14). "Our friends salute

thee" (v.12) are those where John is writing from. This is the relationship John longs for the believers to enjoy. "Peace" and "friends" are beautiful companions when they exist together.

If we would not fall into sin, we must avoid occasions to sin. He that trifles with temptation, will be overcome by the tempter. When Peter went into the High Priest's palace, Satan soon cooled his courage and led him captive into sin.

Meditation.

A Man who wants to see and know a country must not hurry through it by express train, but he must stop in the towns and villages and see what is to be seen. He will know more about the land and its people if he walks the highways, climbs the mountains, stays in the homes, and visits the workshops, than if he does many miles in the day, and hurries through picture galleries as if death were pursuing him.

In like manner, if a man would gain a true acquaintance with the truth of God, he must not hurry through Scripture, but pause for the Lord to speak to him. Cattle do not get the benefit of rich pasture and give their milk for the health of others by being driven at a gallop through the fields; they must be allowed to quietly graze and ruminate for this. It is only by quiet meditation on the truth of God that we are rightly enriched by it.

"Look and Lift up Your Heads."

(A message for the times).

W. E. Vine

THIS encouraging exhortation has a background of solemn announcements as to the conditions prevailing in the world at the close of the present age, and the Divine interpositions and judgements which are to

take place. When there is distress of nations, in their perplexity; when men are “fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world”; when the powers of the heavens are shaken; “when these things begin to come to pass,” says the Lord, “look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh.” (Luke 21: 28).

This is a warning to us against being cast into a spirit of anxious apprehensiveness, against being so occupied with the perilous state of affairs, that we become filled with foreboding and fear, because of what is impending. It is, on the other hand, an encouragement to us to have our hearts’ affections set on Christ, to make His interests our own, to press on toward the mark of our high calling, realising how near is the time of our redemption, with all that this will mean both for Him and for us. To look up means that our thoughts, our aspirations, and expectations are “where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1, R.V.). To lift up our heads is to be characterised by uprightness of walk and conduct before God; it also signifies to be triumphant, in the power of Christ’s victory, over the evil one; and the joyous realisation of His complete authority and absolute control over all the forces of evil; over all the anti-God uprisings in the world; over all the upheavals and confusion that arise from the increasing lawlessness that abounds on every hand.

There are already signs, physical, political, national and international, that we are nearing the end. The use of atomic energy, and all the fearful potentialities of the gamma rays and the cosmic rays, are in themselves indications of the possibilities of the shaking of the power of the heavens. The unprecedented alarms of the nations in expectation of things that are coming on the earth; the national events that are beginning to fulfil the predictions of Scripture as to the affairs of the peoples of the world, both Jew and Gentile; are sufficient to make clear that events are rapidly moving toward the fulfilment of what was foretold by the Lord, concerning the time of the end.

We have good reason, therefore, to be encouraged and strengthened by His words of comfort and cheer. They were designed to be

applicable to us, to enable us to walk worthily of His Name, and as those who are “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Let us then give heed to His word; let us look up and lift up our heads; because our redemption draweth nigh.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.” (Isaiah 26:3).

Observe what directions your thoughts and feelings most readily take when you are alone; then you will form a tolerably correct opinion of your real state.

America's Form of Worship

(The material upon which this article is based was suggested by a similar article that a denominational preacher wrote that was published in a daily newspaper. Ed.).

There is no doubt that an increasing number of Americans claim to have no religion, according to some of the latest polls. In fact, the “Nones” have increased dramatically to a number that would embrace about 46 million US citizens. That seems to be true, and it appears to be a reflection of man's increasing antipathy to God and to any form of worship that acknowledges God or recognizes His rightful control over their lives.

However, while this is the general trend, it would be wide of the mark to say that our culture doesn't include a form of worship. It may be manifested by those who are devotees of professional (or otherwise) pigskins at this season of the year, or by those who, a little later, will crowd into large religious gymnasi-ums to watch ten grown men run up and down a delineated area to try to put a round ball through a hoop. In the summer, there are those who gladly sit for hours in the blazing sun to watch eighteen men perform their ceremony

on a green field. Whatever it is, we can hardly say that worship has declined in our country. It has just changed its colors and character.

There are those who still attend their places of worship on a Sunday, even taking long pilgrimages and paying large tithes to gain entrance. Some include in their vacation plans, a trip to pay homage at some shrine that commemorates the outstanding performers of their group. The usual dress of those of the past day who attended a Christian church gathering has been replaced with the logos of their favorite team or jerseys that replicate the particular group's vestments.

These devotees of the "sporting" religion gather for the ceremony, chanting their praises to the particular "god" of their choice. Some are in enclosed arenas and some in the open air, but all come together to donate to their religious clergy and become intensely occupied with the on-going ceremony that unfolds before their eyes. At those moments of highest intensity, the laity chant their praises to encourage those who are involved in the ritual. Such fervent, faithful attendance at such events borders on superstition of a religious character.

It's just another form of religion. This was recently verified by an article that appeared in a daily newspaper in Melbourne, Australia. It described the ceremony of a church that devotes a particular service to the sporting religion of attendees. "Once a year, the historic Scots' Church in Melbourne's CBD welcomes a rival religion into the holy worship space.

A premiership cup takes its place at the altar, colourful balloons brighten the bluestone facade, and worshippers display their allegiances proudly on their back or draped around their neck."

The pastor was quoted as saying, "We think especially here in Melbourne and Victoria, sport is such a huge part of people's lives and that is where God is, so we think it is really important to be involved." "I think everyone needs something to believe in, and if that is sports, it is better than ice or alcohol or a whole lot of other things."

More could be quoted, but the entire article continues in the same vein.

There are those who perform the ceremony, accompanied by others who control their

movements according to their legal rules of the procedures. Such activities maintain the intense interest of the audience for as long as three hours, likely the same ones who complained about 30 minutes of a sermon in their previous religious activity. The violations of the laws and achievements of the righteous are loudly announced over a public amplification system so that all can be aware of the vital issues that pertain to the proceedings that are taking place.

It could be said that before the eyes of those of the laity, some kind of sacrifice is being dramatically enacted. The intense effort and sacrificial pains of the clergy would equal those of the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel, who leaped and danced about their altar, cutting themselves with lances to gain the approval of their god on that ancient, balmy afternoon. In ancient Rome, a similar ritual was enacted, but it involved men combating vicious beasts in the arena, or the titillating spectacle of radically faithful and unrepentant Christians being attacked and killed or burned mercilessly. The ritual has changed, but the interest of the devotees hasn't. Worship is still the name of the game, and these worshipers comprise the fastest growing religious group in our country. Now, instead of the dull ceremony of Christian religious houses, the venue is the sports bar and the stadium, where those who once might have been willing to recognize that such a day was the Lord's Day, well, now it is just "The Game" day. In place of those who once could quote Scripture verses, there are those who know all the statistics of their particular group or performer in detail.

This is undoubtedly true of the world and those who are "earth dwellers", but sadly, it has also become the addiction of many professing Christians, some in local assemblies, who see nothing wrong with using their time, energies, and money that the Lord has entrusted to them, or other resources to join with other worshipers in the "church of their choice." One ought to be careful that God's accusation of Israel having other gods beside Him is not true of a Christian who has been purchased by the blood of Christ!