

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER ONE - 2  
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***HOW THE CONFLICT BEGAN***

by A. Graham Maxwell  
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Number One: **“How The Conflict Began”** - another look at the Biblical basis for understanding the plan of salvation as God’s provision for restoring peace in His universe. The Bible speaks of a war that began at the very center of God’s family. All of us have been caught up in the consequences of this revolt. The future of God’s family depends upon the outcome of this war, upon God’s successful resolution of the crisis of distrust. The Good News is that God has already won this war!

Welcome to the first of our **“Conversations About God”** - another look at our heavenly Father in the larger setting of the universe-wide great controversy over His character and government. If only God could be here Himself, visibly, in Person, and how we wish He could be, to lead out in these conversations, I believe He might well try to make us all comfortable by sitting down. The Bible records that when Jesus taught the people, He very frequently sat down. Even when He presented the magnificent Sermon on the Mount, Matthew says that He sat down (see Matt. 5:1). Even when He was in the boat, addressing the people on the beach, Luke says that “the Lord sat down in the boat.” (Lk. 5:3)

Now it’s true, it was the custom in those days for teachers to sit down, and Jesus very humbly followed the custom. I like to think of what it says about our God. Though infinite in majesty and power, yet when He came in human form for those three and a half brief years, He didn’t try to intimidate or overwhelm the people with a show of majesty and power. Instead, He humbly sat down among them, and He conversed with them, and He even invited their questions. And so, as a reminder of God’s very gracious and persuasive ways, we too, during these conversations, would like to sit down.

As a matter of fact, it says in the Bible that frequently Jesus taught the most important truths He ever shared with His audiences, eating supper while He reclined at the table. Now as you can tell from our title of this whole series, **“Conversations About God,”** our questions and our conversations these twenty Friday evenings will be primarily about our God.

But one could fairly raise the question “Which God? Whose God are we going to talk about?” You know, this is a Seventh-day Adventist Church, but God obviously is not the exclusive property of Seventh-day Adventists. The Methodists and the Baptists worshipped God before Adventists came on the scene. And the Lutherans were worshipping God before the Methodists and the Baptists came on the scene. And the Jews were worshipping God centuries before there were any Christians. And Adam and Eve were worshipping God before there were any Jews. And the loyal angels throughout the universe were worshipping God before there were any people on our planet. God belongs to all of us, and all of us are members of His family.

Or would it be more correct to say that only the good ones among us are members of God’s family? Is this the way you count your children? Today you report you have one child. Tomorrow maybe three, and the next day only two, because you only recognize your children who are

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behaving well. We've all misbehaved, and yet God recognizes every one of us and counts every one of us as members of the family of the universe.

But even though our heavenly Father is so gracious, even toward us who have misbehaved, the Bible incredibly describes a conflict that broke out in God's family, even to the extent of war up in heaven. The most vivid description of this war is presented in the last of the sixty-six books in the Bible, the book of Revelation. Look at Revelation 12:7-12 (GNB), a description of the war. "Then war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels; but the dragon was defeated, and he and his angels were not allowed to stay in heaven any longer. The huge dragon was thrown out -- that ancient serpent (and serpent reminds us of the Garden of Eden) that ancient serpent, named the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all of his angels with him.

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now God's salvation has come! Now God has shown his power as King! Now his Messiah has shown his authority! For the one who stood before our God and accused our brothers day and night has been thrown out of heaven. Our brothers won the victory over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the truth which they proclaimed; and they were willing to give up their lives and die. And so be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! (which is where we live) For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left." (parentheses supplied)

And when we read this passage about the war up in heaven, it's good to reflect that before there was war, there was peace, and there was peace throughout the whole universe, and there was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other, and all of them trusted their heavenly Father, and He in turn could safely trust in them. And where there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect freedom, perfect peace, perfect security. And that's the way it's going to be in the hereafter. You notice that the Bible never talks about prisons in the promised land. There will be no need for police on every corner, and our wives and daughters can walk the streets alone at any hour.

How the prophets must have enjoyed describing the peace and the security and the freedom of the hereafter. And they do this in many places. Isaiah, for example, says there will be no lions there. (Isaiah 35:9) And little children will lead them (Isaiah 11:6). Well, if there are lions there, they will eat straw like an ox (Isaiah 11:7; 65:25), and little children will lead them. Sometimes Isaiah says there will be lions, but not fearsome ones (Isaiah 35:9), and if there are lions, there will be no need to be afraid. Zechariah gives a picture the Jews would love (Zechariah 8:4,5), because the family means so much to them. He says that in the city to come, the elderly will sit with staff in hand for very age, and the boys and girls will play safely in the streets -- but not yet.

Looking to the past when there once was peace, a crisis of distrust broke out in God's family, and thus sin entered our universe for the first time. For, as God explained to Moses, when he disobeyed Him and smote the rock, sin in its essence, is a breach, or breakdown of trust. We all know the story if we have ever read the Bible through, that, moved by jealousy and pride, the most brilliant of all God's creatures, the one pictured in Ezekiel as standing in the very presence of God (Ezekiel 28:14), the one described in Isaiah as knowing God so well that he went forth from the presence of God, bearing light and truth to his fellow angels (Isaiah 14:12), and that's why he was given the name Lucifer, which means "bearer of light," "teacher of truth"

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(that's one of the names of Jesus Christ Himself); but this brilliant and most trusted, even revered, angel, set out to undermine trust in God by circulating misinformation and lies about our heavenly Father, and thus he became not a bearer of light and teacher of truth, but a bearer of lies, even the adversary. And the name that means adversary is "Satan." You can see why we shouldn't call him Lucifer any longer. He no longer bears light, but lies. His real name is Satan, the opponent, the adversary.

How this adversary worked among the angels! In his pretentiously pious manner, he insinuated that God Himself was an untrustworthy liar, and specifically he charged that God was arbitrary, not respectful of the freedom of his children; that God was exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. And thus he hoped to turn the angels away from God and win them to the worship of Satan himself.

Now it seems unbelievable that a creature could presume to think of himself as God, and suggest that angels worship him. But Satan actually is capable of such insanity. Look at Isaiah 14:12-14 (RSV). This is mentioned in other places in the Bible, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star," (now, your favorite version may read "Lucifer" there, perhaps. It's exactly the same word. I chose a version that would have "Day Star" to remind us this is one of the names of Christ - Lucifer, Morning Star, Day Star) "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn. How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north;' (where the gods are pictured as gathering) 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.'" (parentheses supplied)

He even asked his Creator to get down on His knees in the wilderness of temptation and worship His own creature. Look at Matthew 4:8-11 (RSV), "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, (the devil speaking) 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' (A created being asking his Creator to worship him!) Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! for it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him." The angels watched that whole experience. They must have been stunned to see one of themselves asking God to get down on His knees and worship.

And then after the charges that God is selfish, and an untrustworthy liar, Satan wasted no time in sharing those accusations that he presented to the angels, with our first parents. That's recorded in Genesis 3:1-5 (RSV). "Now the serpent was more subtle," (some versions have cunning, crafty) "was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but God said "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, (which God didn't say) lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "(That's not true), you will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (parentheses supplied) "Eve, don't you want to be like God? Isn't that your prayer?" So he deceived her into thinking there was this miraculous shortcut to becoming like God.

Well, we know how God bore long and patiently as He watched this insurrection developing

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in His family. He watched until one-third of his brilliant, intelligent angels agreed with Satan that God was not worthy of their trust. This means that even God, though infinite in power, even He could not persuade one-third of the brilliant angels that Satan's charges were false.

Finally, as John describes, war broke out in heaven, (see Rev. 12:7) and whether we want to be or not, all of us here are caught up in the consequences of that war. Everyone in this universe is unavoidably involved, and the future of God's family to which we all belong, depends upon the outcome of this war. Everything depends upon the successful resolution of this conflict of distrust. Compared with God's solution of this problem, our own personal salvation, important as that is, is relatively inconsequential, for if God does not win this war, who would want to be saved? In fact, what would salvation mean, if God should lose this conflict of distrust?

But it doesn't leave out our salvation for God to win this war. The way in which God has worked to win you and me, is the way in which He has won the war. Even if He should fail to win you and me, the methods that God has used to persuade us that He can be trusted, and to win us back to repentance and faith, the methods He has used to do this, are what have led the universe to tell Him that he is absolutely trustworthy, and they will trust and worship Him for the rest of eternity, because of the demonstration of His goodness and trustworthiness shown by the methods He has used. So you see, as much as God wants to save all of us, He could fail, and still not lose the war. If you and I here tonight, should fail to respond to God's winsome and persuasive ways, and be lost, there's no way God could lose the war, for the war was won two thousand years ago.

All through the book of Revelation, you notice, the angels are described as celebrating God's victory in the war, and they never cease telling Him that He's proved Himself to be righteous, and holy, and just, and good, and infinitely worthy of their trust. The early Christians sorely needed the encouraging message of that sixty-sixth book, and the picture of the angels celebrating, because there was a serious crisis among God's people on this planet at that time.

For one thing, the Second Coming seemed to be indefinitely delayed. They thought He would come around 50 A.D., and Paul had to tell them, "No, not yet," in his letter to Thessalonica (see 2 Thess. 2:3). "There are still more things to happen." By the 90's, they wondered what had gone wrong, that Jesus had not yet returned?

And besides this, there were heresies in the church. There were some even teaching that Christ had not really come in human form - they claimed He had not suffered and really died; He had faked it all. They're called the Docetists, who taught that He'd just pretended to do it. There was great opposition and serious persecution. The apostles were all dead, save one, and he was the elderly John, now a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos.

What good news was there to encourage the early Christian? You could count on God, when things were that bleak, to send a message of encouragement and enlightenment and explanation to His people. He surely wouldn't send a book of mysteries, and dates and schedules of events that they could not possibly understand. Rather, that sixty-sixth book that He did send, the book of Revelation, which means "clarification", not "mystification", that sixty-sixth book is an invitation to discouraged early Christians to look a little higher, to take the larger view of things, to see how they've all been caught up in a vast great controversy that affects the whole universe, and that it's a controversy over God's own character and government. Read on and see that God has already won this war, and the angels all agree with Him, that this is the good news; then realize that God is inviting us to join in the celebration. Go out to the world and

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invite all others who are willing to listen, to join in God's victory in the war, and then we Christians might not seem so much on the defensive all the time. We have good news to tell. There's no way God and His side can lose. Should we not join the winning side? - is the invitation in that sixty-sixth book.

The book also says you can count on God to wait until this truth about Him, this good news about His character and government, has been spread all over the world. God is the kind of person who will wait until His children have had an opportunity to understand the issues in the war, and to be ready for the awesome events the Bible describes as taking place before Jesus' return. To see and to present the plan of salvation in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God, is, I believe, the highest privilege of God's friends on this planet today.

Now, it's perhaps understandable that, as beginners, recognizing we've been sinners and we need to be saved, that at first we should tend to be preoccupied with what God has done for you and me that we might be saved. But then as we grow up, and learn to read the Bible as a whole, it becomes apparent that our own personal salvation, important as that is, is only a small part of a far larger plan that involves the peace and security of the whole, vast universe—the confirmation of the truth about our God Himself.

Now, it is true, we recognize, that not all Christians have understood the plan of salvation in this larger view. Even the great theologians of the Reformation (and how we should be grateful to them for what they dared to do), but those Reformers did not see it this way. Even Luther, maybe the greatest hero of the Reformation, and so admired by many of us, I'm sure - even he was more preoccupied with God's gracious provisions to save you and me. That is understandable, for Luther was unable to make much use of the sixty-sixth book, the book of Revelation.

Much as Luther correctly insisted that we should use the Bible, and the Bible only - you know, **sola scriptura** - even though he urged that, he himself was not able to use all sixty-six books. Particularly, did he regard Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation as inferior to the other books of the New Testament. In the book of Revelation, he said, he found "too little about Christ and too much no one could understand." Then he summarized: "There's no way the Holy Spirit could have inspired" the sixty-sixth book. As a result of not being able to use the book of Revelation, he missed the larger view, as do many of his admirers today. We all admire him to be sure, but we don't have to agree with every detail in his picture. I think if he were alive today, he too might rejoice in the larger view.

Some of us though, who were so greatly helped by Luther, who indeed placed the Bible as the highest of all authorities, have done what Luther recommended, and we have studied the Bible seriously - not just sixty-two books or less, but all sixty-six. I remember about forty years ago, I made up my mind I would start reading the Bible as a whole, and relate all its parts to the one central theme - this revelation of the truth about God in the great controversy. Since that time, I've had the privilege of leading groups through all sixty-six (it takes about a year each time) more than one hundred times, and every time I go through, it becomes even clearer to me that the Bible is an inspired record of God's handling of the crisis in His family.

Now there are no shortcuts to trust, or the Bible would be a much briefer book. Claims prove nothing. The Bible warns about accepting mere claims, and we'll spend some time on that. Even when a person has been falsely accused of being untrustworthy, only by the demonstration of

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trustworthiness over a long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances - especially difficult ones - can trust be reestablished and confirmed. The Bible records just such a demonstration - all the way from the entrance of sin into the universe, up until the death of Christ on the cross. My understanding is, that Christ died to reestablish peace in God's family. The apostle Paul so explains the meaning, and the purpose of the cross, and why Jesus had to die, and we'll spend a whole evening on this a little later in our series.

Just by way of introduction tonight, notice the following three passages, where Paul makes this point so forcibly. Look at Colossians 1:19, 20 (RSV), "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile" (to atone, to bring to unity) "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." (parentheses supplied) Note where peace is made. Or, to take another version, *Today's English* or the *Good News Bible* (GNB), "For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's death on the cross, and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven." Truly, that's a description of the ending of the war.

Notice two other passages in Ephesians that make the same point: Ephesians 1:9, 10 (RSV), "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to His purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things" (that's the opposite of war; that's peace) - "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." The other one, Ephesians 3:9, 10 says, (RSV), ". . . and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities in the heavenly places." The way God has worked through His church, through His people, is the way in which He has demonstrated the truth about Himself, and won the war.

That God has worked through the church is explained in a dramatic way in 1 Corinthians 4:9 (RSV), ". . . we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men." Do you know, the Greek word for "spectacle" is "**theatron**," from which we get theater. Some saints might be reluctant to attend the theater. We need to realize we live in a theater all the time - God's stage. On this stage He's demonstrated the truth about Himself by the way He has dealt with His church. Then, on the inclusion of the whole family in the results of this demonstration, look at John 12:32 (GNB), "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw . ." (not "all **men**"; that's supplied) "I will draw **everyone** to me." And that's the real meaning of the original. All; everyone. Not just people on this planet, but even the loyal angels, I believe, were drawn closer to God by this costly demonstration.

Now these verses say to me that Christ died for sinless angels too. They certainly needed no forgiveness or adjustment of their legal standing, and yet the Bible says they needed the message of the cross. So what is the message of the cross? Evidently it's much more than the mere payment of a penalty so God can justly forgive you and me. The cross was needed by the loyal angels. This surely suggests - and we'll do it this series - that we ought to go back to the foot of the cross and join the family of the universe, in watching closely just how Jesus died. Then listen very carefully to how Jesus cried, and what He cried, ". . . My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46 (KJV). Now, what does that mean, and how does that suffering and death bring peace once again to God's family?

I believe that in the light of the great controversy, all Christian beliefs take on a much

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broader significance. Particularly, does the gospel take on a much larger meaning. You see, while we're still preoccupied with our salvation, the gospel quite naturally might be understood as the good news about what God has done for me . . . me . . . and you too, to be sure.

But in the larger, great controversy setting, the gospel is the truth about our gracious God, that ends the war, and confirms the loyalty of the universe and wins some of us back to repentance and to trust. I believe, more strongly than I believe anything, that the most important of all our beliefs is the truth about our God. God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, vengeful and severe. He is, instead, precisely as His Son revealed Him to be. We believe the testimony of Jesus when He said “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” (See John 14:9) God is just as loving and gracious as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal.

Could there be any better news than that? To me, that's the everlasting good news that holds the loyalty of the universe, and wins us back, and will hold our loyalty and trust for the rest of eternity. This is the message we have the high privilege of sharing with people all over this planet who may not know they are members of God's family, but who deserve to know, and deserve to hear this truth. The question for our series then is, “Can we be sure that God is just like this?” Jesus always welcomed questions, and we ought to do the same.

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April 14, 2007

(Introduction of Pastor Venden for the questions)

### Questions:

1. Shouldn't these “conversations” be about Jesus?

If we believe that Jesus Christ is God, then when we talk about Jesus we are talking about God. And the whole purpose of His coming to this earth is to reveal the truth about God.

2. How can you really ask any questions about God? How can we know anything about Him? If it is true, as Paul says, that God is sovereign and “His ways are past finding out” (Rom. 11:33), why should we bother to waste our time trying to find out about Him?

This question which arises in Rom 9-11 follows Rom. 1-8 where it describes in some detail how God *does* run His universe. Paul sensed that some of the Jews, after reading chaps. 1-8 would become a little upset, because they thought they had a special agreement with God. But Romans 9 suggests that God will run His universe any way He chooses. That is, He will save all who trust Him - Jew, or Gentile.

3. If God is sovereign, why does He allow war? If God is really able to run His universe any way He chooses, how can we speak of a conflict or war arising as we read in Rev. 12?

In the light of our last question this is very relevant because it explains why so many who focus on the sovereignty of God cannot wrap their minds around the idea that there could be a war in heaven. It's just too much for them to take in. This is why Luther and others like him have trouble with the book of Revelation. There must be some very, very important reason why God would allow a war to take place. By the principles of good administration, we would probably suggest that God must be weak.

4. Why did God create Lucifer? If God had foreknowledge of this war and He knew that Lucifer would be the center of it, why did He create him?

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When you consider what anguish and terrible consequences have resulted, then you must realize that God had some very, very important reasons for allowing it. We must be clear on the fact that the controversy is not over who has the most power. The devils recognize that, and it scares them. (James 2:19) The real issue is, Who is telling the truth?

5. How many Christians know about this war? In light of the clear statement in Revelation 12:10 about this war, how widely is this concept agreed upon among Christians?

Unfortunately, very few Christians have seemed to understand this down through the ages, but some seem to have gotten glimpses of it, such as John Milton, and a famous mid-nineteenth century English pastor by the name of Herman Melville. However, the person who has done the most to make this matter known was a woman, by the name of Ellen White. What she has written on this subject is absolutely magnificent. As I see it, the greatest contribution that the Seventh-day Adventist Church could make to the world at this time would be to tell them this marvelous good news.

6. Does this perspective really matter? How does having this perspective affect our Christian beliefs in general?

a: Sabbath - In the narrower view that focuses on our own salvation and what has happened on this planet, the Sabbath was given before there was sin. If this is so, why would you keep it? It appears to be a mere test of our obedience; and in fact, many people so explain the Sabbath. In the larger view, by contrast, the Sabbath was given *after* sin entered the universe. Then it no longer is an arbitrary test of our obedience, but it is a great gift that God has given to us to remind us of all the things that the Bible describes as being associated with the Sabbath - the freedom and perfection that God gave us in Eden, the rescue in the Exodus, and the events of crucifixion week. The seventh-day Sabbath is connected with all these things.

Would this be true of other beliefs?

b. Take the law as a whole. In the larger view the law is God's emergency measure to help us. The apostle specifically says so.

c: The tree of knowledge - in the narrower view, the tree was placed in the garden before sin, and thus it was just an arbitrary test of obedience. In the larger great controversy view they were told not to go to that tree **after** sin had entered the universe. Then you look on that tree not as a test of their obedience but as something given to protect them. Lucifer could only approach them at the tree, and that is where he did. Thus the more one takes the larger view, the less arbitrary God looks.

7. If God won the war, why isn't it over?

Although the rest of the universe is celebrating, we don't even seem to know what the war was about yet, and so God, gracious as He always is, waits for us.

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Maxwell: Now, normally the handwritten lessons or questions, we'll especially save for the earlier part. But this is a rather preliminary question: Why was this meeting started without prayer? Uhm.

Venden: We did talk about it.

Maxwell: Oh, we talked about it a lot. In fact, we prayed; hope you did. We started with prayer before we went in, and all the time we there. But we actually talked about it in a more theological way than that. Prayer is conversation with God as with a friend. Right? So we thought if we did it right, and the atmosphere was really reverent, and we really meant it, we'd be praying the whole hour. So I hope you felt comfortable with that. We have prayer at the end. We actually didn't want prayer to seem to be the signal to start the meeting.

Too often prayer has become the signal to the choir - It's time for the response. We even break it down, and when we come to, "For we ask in Thy name," the choir becomes alert; and when the preacher says "Amen" they hit it. And that's so sad, because "Amen" is a very important thing to say. "Amen" means, I really mean what I've said, Lord. And that's why you can use Amen at the beginning or in the middle. It does not belong on the end.

But if someone says "Amen" near the beginning, beware; you'll start the whole choir tomorrow morning. So, see how it's become a custom? It's a pity. And to pray in Jesus' name can belong at the beginning or in the middle. It really would be very fitting at the beginning. We approach God in the light of all that Jesus has revealed.

So, to make sure that we didn't make it common, because we were going to converse with and about God the whole hour, we didn't do it. But if anyone was ill at ease, we would be sorry about that.

Here's a question: Does God limit His power in dealing with Satan?

It seems to me, that just as the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God had to veil His life-giving glory or they would have been consumed, there must be the same restraint with respect to the adversary. God could wipe him out in a moment, any time He wishes. And that's why some who see no hazard in the use of force and power, may be just a wee bit disappointed, respectfully, that God hasn't wiped out the opposition sooner. There are other values more important, that God has restrained His power and veiled His life-giving glory. The time will come, to be sure.

Then one last thing: Did God deal with Christ on the cross the same way He will deal with the sinner at the final gathering around the throne at the end of the millennium; no force, no vengeance?

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We'll spend one whole evening on the meaning of the cross as the answer to this. Along with that will go, There is no need to be afraid of God, and so on. So this comes up many times.

I believe that if we want to know how the wicked will die in the end, if we believe that Jesus died the death of a sinner - oh, we have various picturesque ways of saying that; that "all our sins were laid on Him." We have many pictures in the Bible; we accept all of them. But if He died the sinner's death, we should then, if we want to know how the sinner's going to die in the end, go to the cross and watch Jesus die.

Now there are some differences, to be sure. We should discuss those later. When the wicked die in the end, they won't be saying, "John, look after Mother." And they won't be saying, "Father, into Thy hands we commit our spirits." And they won't be saying, "We forgive you, we forgive you."

You see, Jesus died the way sinners died, but He died as a perfect saint. Look at the way He behaved. He died even conducting an evangelistic effort. Right to the moment He died, He was winning souls there, and He won the thief. I don't see the wicked doing that at the end of the millennium.

So sometimes we make the deaths too similar. Sometimes we fail to recognize the similarity that's supposed to be there. There's a very significant book that has come out. It's put out by Verdict Publications, to be sure. That's Robert Brinsmead's headquarters down in Fallbrook. But the author is an evangelical writer. His book is entitled, The Fire That Consumes. He's not an Adventist by any means at all; doesn't agree with us on many things. But he says, "I've gone through the whole Bible, and I find nothing in support of the immortality of the soul or the eternally burning fires of hell." It's a stunning book. We ought to use it more.

He says, "The one person chiefly responsible for the doctrine of hell in Christianity, is Calvin." I'm glad he said it, you know. It's in the book. And then he said, "If you want to know how the sinner will die," he said, "go to the cross." So I like those parts of that book. Does somebody have a copy?

Comment: I think they shut the speaker system off, and so we didn't get anything. Would you want to reassemble what was said? We didn't get one single thing about the.

..

C [Dr. Provonsha?]: . . . we first thought it was staged and then we realized it wasn't.

Venden: No, it wasn't staged.

Maxwell: Oh, I wish the sound had been left on. I think he's the one I saw outside the post office the other day on a table. And he has a great concern, and a great burden, but I don't know enough to comment on it.

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Venden: He was talking about Russians and infiltration and that kind of thing.

Maxwell: Yes.

Comment: It wasn't a planned thing.

AGM & Venden: No, No. [laughter]

Venden: At least Graham hadn't shared that plan with me.

Maxwell: No.

Venden: All right, there was a hand at the back.

Maxwell: Ah, yes.

Comment: That was the same question I had. I couldn't hear a thing. Could you just repeat a few of the things he said that were intelligible to you?

Maxwell: They weren't that clear, but he had trouble about Russia's treatment of certain people. He is a political refugee from Russia, I believe he said.

Venden: I was so nervous about what was happening, I didn't hear a thing either.

Maxwell: Yes, yes [laughter]. Well now, that's a worthy theological point. You see, if God comes to teach us and He intimidates us and overwhelms us and makes us afraid, you don't even hear Him. When we're worried, we don't hear. So the first thing God does, is to make us comfortable. Now, if we're not paying attention, there may be she-bears. There may be thunder and lightning as on Sinai. But learning has not happened yet. We're just standing there, promising Him everything, but not listening very well.

So I believe that's why Jesus came - with no thunder, no lightning, no she-bears. The earth didn't open up. People were just as bad as before. You notice, they didn't revere Him and respect Him. But Mary with her bad record, known as a wicked woman in the town, was not afraid to sit at His feet. He's really trying to say that's how He'd rather do it.

So to sit and converse is really the only way for the best things to happen. And I hope we're sort of symbolizing that by using this approach.

Venden: The people in control of our sound took an action to cut all the microphones, feeling that that might be the appropriate thing to do at that point. The only problem is, if you had heard everything he'd said, you might have spent the rest of the evening thinking about that. So now that you didn't hear it, you spent the rest of the evening wondering. . .

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Maxwell: . . . wondering what he said.

Venden: So there wasn't any way we could win.

Maxwell: That's true.

Venden: I saw a hand back there, Graham.

Comment: I'm a more than second-generation Christian. And I've heard the word "faith" since I can remember. We've heard "trust" and "confidence" as interchangeable.

Maxwell: Yes, in fact, see the third evening will be [on the topic], "All God Asks of Us is Trust." What went wrong in God's universe is the breach of trust. Trust broke down. There was a breakdown of mutual trust. And so the third evening we'll discuss "All God Asks of Us is Trust."

In religious terms, trust is usually called "faith", but "faith" connotes some other things that trust does not. We say to our little girls, "Be careful whom you trust. And if somebody offers you a ride on the way home from school, or offers you an ice cream cone to persuade you to get into the car, if you don't know who's driving the car, don't you get in.

We can understand trust, but faith has assumed all kinds of other connotations, such as knowing something and believing something without any evidence. I think that's the devil's perversion of trust. The only way the devil can win in the great controversy, is to persuade people that it's a virtue, somehow, to believe without evidence; because he doesn't have any evidence. So the only way he's going to win, is if somehow we are religiously convinced that we should not demand evidence. If we demand evidence, the devil loses. The truth is with God. That's why He's not afraid to be investigated.

That's why Romans 3:4 says that God has taken His case into court. You don't think the devil has taken his case into court! He'd lose. What he does is to intimidate people, and bribe the judge and corrupt the jury, because he doesn't have the truth.

God openly takes His case into court. He says, "You can look into anything you like; criticize anything, investigate anything." Because the truth is with Him. Now, I would understand faith in that light.

Now as the Pastor, though, said, this word involves much more than being convinced about something. The Biblical word implies really quite a commitment on your part. It's something you would stake your life on.

It's like the word "know", which is not just to be aware of something. But in the Bible, to know, is even the word you use for the love between a husband and his wife. That's the word all through the Bible. To know God is to even love Him and admire Him; to be

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intimate with Him in an appropriate manner.

So faith and knowledge come right together there. And love comes with it. There's not much difference in the Bible really, when you're talking about love, and faith, and knowledge. They're very, very close.

So when He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you," He knows them; but He doesn't know them as His friends. So I would see trust in that light.

Comment: I'd like to provide a good illustration. I took a ten-dollar bill out of my pocket, and I held it out and says, "Would you believe me if I said I'd give it to you?" And the people would just sit there.

Finally one lady says, "Yeah, I believe you," and she reached out and took it. And it says in Ephesians 2:8,10, that we are saved by our faith in Jesus Christ. It's a gift, and in order to get a gift, you have to reach out and take it. And in my illustration, faith is believing God, what He says, enough to reach out and take the gift.

Maxwell: Now, you've got to know Him well enough. . .

Comment: That's right!

Maxwell: . . . and trust Him well enough, to know that He isn't out of His mind, and that's why He's giving ten dollars away. . .

Comment: Perfect!

Maxwell: . . . or something like that. And also that what He's giving you is not counterfeit and not Monopoly money or something like that. I mean, one has to investigate that with great care. If you held out ten dollars to me, I'd be confused at first. I know you're very generous, but. . .

Comment: See, you know me.

Maxwell: Well, it would help that I know you, you see. Nine hundred people accepted Jim Jones' gifts. And it was a mighty serious mistake. They shouldn't have trusted him.

Comment: All right, and in that respect, we have to know God enough, and trust Him well enough, to accept, believe and then reach out and take.

Maxwell: Well, if you know Him and trust Him enough, that already is belief; that already is faith, you see. You already have it.

Comment: True, but I say that we have to make one more step. And. . .

Maxwell: You can't say, "God, now I know You; now I really trust You; now I'll accept

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Your gift of faith." I already have it.

Comment: True, but you can't just sit there. A reaction is demanded.

Maxwell: He grows.

Comment: Yes. But a reaction. . . In physics you talk about the action-reaction working. I think the same principle would apply here. That there has to be some kind of reaction to God, in accepting His plan, or His package.

Maxwell: See, your point is worth considering, because it's very widely believed that faith entirely a gift of God. He just plants it in your heart. So it's like saying, "God, tonight I don't trust You at all. I want to wake up in the morning trusting You." Do you wake up in the morning, trusting Him? He put it in there? That wouldn't be worth a whole lot, would it?

No, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," means faith comes from looking at the evidence. And if you haven't got the evidence, you better not trust. So I think, though, the idea that it grows and we do respond. . . faith is something we do. Is that your point? Sure is.

Comment: No, it involves an action-reaction response.

Maxwell: That's right; a back and forth [not clear].

Comment: . . . a stimulus response.

Maxwell: Conversation with God as with a friend increases faith. Sure.

Venden: A dynamic interaction between persons, such as is going on right now between the two of you.

Maxwell: That's right.

Venden: I saw a hand over here.

Comment: You said before in the sanctuary, that God took a great risk by in His foreknowledge creating Lucifer and allowing sin to happen, and He was willing to pay the price. It seems like He did pay a price, but we're also paying a price - every day. And ever since the world has been created, we've been paying a price. There are lots of people who look at the price that we've paid, and don't think of God very well, when they look at that price.

Maxwell: I think that's a very fair observation. I think if we went to God and said, "This isn't fair," He'd say, "This may surprise you, but I agree with you, it isn't fair. This isn't fair; the whole mess isn't fair. It was not supposed to be this way." But if we're God's

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friends, we're willing to share in this thing, as we will share in the final triumph.

I'm thinking of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, I think more of that man and that book every time I read it. I used to think he didn't compare with Isaiah. Not so. For forty years that man took messages about God, magnificent pictures of God, to the king and to the people. And they cut up his messages and threw them in the fire, and threw him into a miry pit. I mean, what respect did he receive at all? My, he suffered for forty years! And in the end, where did he wind up? Dragged against his will down to Egypt. His life seemed a total failure. I think in the resurrection, God will take Jeremiah's hand and say, "Thank you very much."

Job: It wasn't fair, was it? It really wasn't fair. Well, it wasn't supposed to be fair. It was part of the demonstration. And that's why I love to tell the story here in Loma Linda of Dr. Orel Fisher (sp?), the ophthalmologist. It wasn't fair he got malignancy in his cheekbone. Only in his thirties, with a wife and a little girl. It just wasn't fair. And he was so respected by other ophthalmologists in this whole part of the country.

But he never wavered. And a year before he died, he invited Jack Provonsha, Charles Teel, Sr. and me to come to his house. And we knelt on the carpet in his sitting room. He said, "I want you to pray for me, but I'm not demanding that God make me well. I just want to be strengthened so that I can let God say through me whatever He wants to say." He said, "Now, I've asked you three, because you've all helped me develop a picture of God that will see me, I hope, through this next terrible year."

And his behavior that next year was overwhelming. Lots of people came and said, "If you had more faith, you'd be healed." And they were all well-meaning people. Some fasted, and made covenants and promises and confessions. It was all good, but he never got any better. And because he didn't get better, they were quite shaken. And guess who strengthened their faith.

So in the end when he was so sick, and his face was distorted - it was so sad to watch - he was still encouraging people. So shortly before he died, he asked his wife to put his reel-to-reel tape recorder by the bed. He says, "You go to Sabbath School; take our little girl with you." And he left a message.

He says, "When I'm gone, I hope you won't lose faith in God. You know what He's like. We've shared this together." It's a very moving thing he said, and it ends with, "Good night, until the morning." He died soon thereafter, and we same three had the privilege of conducting his funeral. You can say nice things at the funeral of someone like that.

But then when his wife recovered enough, she remembered what he'd put on the tape, and she transcribed it. And I had a great privilege of being a little help with it. And it's been printed - thousands of copies. "Till The Morning" - just been rebound with a new cover. And many offices of doctors and dentists and nurses and others, have found it most appropriate to have a little pile of "Till The Morning" in there. It wasn't fair, but oh, what a witness he bore!

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See, none of it's fair, from what happened to God, right on down. But if we become His friends, and really members of the family, we'll share with Him in the miserable unfairness, realizing He's paid a whole lot more than we have.

If I didn't know about Him, though, I think I'd be griping terribly about the situation. And some - I have it so pleasantly, compared with some. I don't know why some people go from one disaster to another. Terrible things! And in the middle of one that's almost enough to overwhelm you, they get some more news of the devastating kind.

I can just think in the last single year here of people, one we all were so fond of. And he was hit on all sides: one, two, three, four, five. It just didn't seem fair. I hope he loves God enough and trusts Him enough to be willing to wait and see how things work out.

Venden: We were just on the phone with a dear friend today. Same situation. Just the news as of yesterday - very serious; and you wonder, and I appreciate what you've shared.

Comment: Do we all have to go through the tribulation that's mentioned in the book of Revelation? A lot of the people say that the rapture— the church is going to be taken out before that time, that God won't put us all through that.

Maxwell: Yeah, you used some very interesting phrases in connection: "put us all through that," and so on.

Comment: That's what I've heard.

Maxwell: Yeah; when I was a small boy, I had such a vivid anticipation of the time of trouble; it used to worry me terribly. It still worries me, but for a different reason. Because I imagined myself in the basement of some cathedral, being stretched on the rack, with a funnel in my mouth, and you know, hot fluid being poured down - not apple cider, either. [laughter] And so on - that scared me.

Now I realize there are much more serious things that can happen to a person. I think Job is the best example of this. See, on the one hand, Job is the kind of a person who could survive the time of trouble without collapsing and letting God down. What more could happen to Job than happened? I see Job as a type of those who will survive.

But note what caused Job his greatest trouble. Was it the loss of his family? That was terrible. Was it the loss of his estate? Was it the loss of his health, which was so bad, he was covered with boils? What caused him the greatest trouble? The theologians! It's true. And they sounded so polite and helpful. They were so moved, you know, when they saw him - having come a long way - they loved him, and he responded to love. They sat there without saying a word for seven days and seven nights. In Clinical Pastoral Education you're told not to talk too much when you sit at the bedside of the suffering.

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And they were there. And then they spoke up. And they said, "Job, you know why you're in this mess." And they gave him the most widely-held theological explanation of suffering, and they were absolutely wrong!

But it really disturbed him. Finally, he had to say, "Look, I wish you would please be quiet. You are not helping me at all. Let me talk this over with God." So he turns to God, and he very candidly discusses his dilemma, and his disappointment that God won't speak to him.

And the three friends are quaking for their friend Job. "Don't talk to God like that. You can't talk to God like that! You can't raise those questions. He'll zap on the dungheap if you don't stop."

And God finally says when He came, to the amazement of the theologians - they thought they'd be complimented for their fruitless efforts - He said, "Job has said of Me what is right. Pray for these three."

See, the worst suffering that could come, would be confused, deceitful, erroneous ideas about our God. Because the only thing that will see us through these times of unfairness and of trouble and confusion, is to have a very clear picture of God. Nobody knows what's going to happen to us. You know, you may have one thing and I may have another. Some people who don't seem to be troubled physically, have other kinds of troubles. There are lots of kinds of trouble.

Now on this basis, if God knows that you and I could survive the time of trouble — all right, God does not allow a person to be tested more than he is able to bear; that's a great verse, isn't it? - if He lets us go through it, He's complimenting you and me. He's saying of you and me, what He said of Job: "Satan, you can do anything you like to this man. He won't let me down." Would you like to hear God call you by name before the angels and say, "This man will not let Me down"?

So if you and I find ourselves plunged into the time of trouble, it isn't going to be pleasant, but there's a great compliment in it.

Venden: Graham, he mentioned another word that may open up an area that we'll cover — the word "rapture," and the whole idea that is abroad with many very sincere Christians regarding God's people being taken away. Would you comment just a bit on that?

Maxwell: Yes, when we talk about what Christ is waiting for, we naturally get into the Second Coming, and so on, and it would be a good time to do it. But in the meantime— you know, it's so interesting to drive behind a car, and the back bumper will say, "If there's no one at the wheel, you'll know that I've been raptured." And so on. Have you seen one of those?

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Now, those who look forward with keen anticipation to the rapture, are some of the most devout Christians in the whole world. They really are. They don't want to miss this. So we really need to look at the passages in the Scripture that talk about Christ's coming and every eye seeing Him, like the lightning from the east to the west— and put all those together. So, I think that a certain other experience has sometimes been confused with the visible, magnificent Second Coming of Christ, when the dead in Christ are raised, and we who are alive and remain are caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air.

And I would hate to lose that, because I use it every funeral. It's the most wonderful thing in the whole Bible. That if you and I should die before the Lord should come, we will not be at a disadvantage. The dead in Christ rise first. Then we who are alive and remain, will be caught up together. God makes it up to those who may have died first. Now, the rapture loses that wonderful page [?], because it's all happened before.

So anyway, we should take a look at the verses. The only fair way, I think, is not to take here a verse and there a verse, but to take the whole sixty-six books. And it belongs to you and me and the rest equally. And let's take a look sometime. Yeah, if you want to pursue that further, let me know. Yeah. That's fair enough.

Comment: I like your idea about the foreknowledge of God, but I'm not sure I understand it yet, or well enough. Could you say more? The Bible says that He knows the end from the beginning. And I've always thought, Well, that means He knows the end of anything from its beginning, but not necessarily that He knows the end of something before it begins or before comes to pass.

Maxwell: Well. . . yes.

Comment: The matter of risk— I don't see how there was a risk involved, if He knew, could see, exactly what would happen to everyone, including Lucifer and all of us. And I don't see a risk there. Can you help us . . .

Maxwell: A risk was mentioned over here. Now, number one, we recognize that that passage the pastor referred to, God's unsearchable, inscrutable ways, which is so far above us; when it comes to how God knows the future, that belongs in that department. I don't know how He even knows the entire past - back to eternity, that is. Even the computers can't get back to that. And I don't know how He creates. We have some ideas. But there are many things that are above us and beyond. I don't know how He can exist for eternity, or how you and I will be able to exist for eternity. This just boggles the mind.

The Bible pictures God as having no limitations in His foreknowledge. But some of the nicest people I know — people I would trust, I would live next door to in the Kingdom with pleasure, if I make it — wonder about this, because of the mention of risk and the matter of freedom.

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So all I can do is offer the way I look at it. And I have confidence in those who take the other view. They too want to put God in a good light. I like everybody who wants to put God in a good light. So I'm not going to put anybody who's putting God in a good light, in a bad light either.

So my feeling is, I don't know where to put any limitations on God. I don't know how to begin to do it. And because I like to follow the Biblical picture just as literally as possible. The Bible never, ever suggests any limitation in God's knowledge, past, present or future. The past, present and the future are all alike to Him. I don't know how He does it.

Some say, Well, He must be bored if He knows it all at once. Well, He's infinitely capable of handling boredom. [laughter] There's no problem there. Not to get too involved, but the good news about it tonight: You see, if He knows the future so well that He can see you and me, and He knows you are going to be saved and I am going to be lost, I'm not scared to have Him know that. Because if He knows this is the only life I'm going to have, He'll make it as pleasant as possible. He knew Judas was going to betray Him, and He got down on His knees and washed his feet.

So I would rather live with the thought that I don't have to limit God's foreknowledge at all. But though He knows everything, I have no need to be afraid. The only thing left is the word "risk." Ellen White uses the word "risk." That becomes a problem of communication and the use of language. You have to match many, many things with that. Don't push risk into the ground, or you have this problem: If there's real risk, then there's real risk of failure, and God cannot say, "I will triumph in the end."

And some will say, "Well, He will triumph because He has infinite power." Well, then, if He's definitely going to triumph, then there's no risk. So, just come back to the picture of God; we don't have to worry - that's the thing.

Venden: I appreciate the way our questions have really been in the general arena this evening's presentation.

Maxwell: Oh, yeah.

Venden: We have many, many questions on many subjects. Some of them will be covered in the future, and so forth. But I think that's very helpful.

Maxwell: You always come back to God.

Comment: Could we not foresee that ourselves are [that the entrance of sin on earth was] likely because Satan was cast out on the earth— on this planet?

Maxwell: Yes. Of course, if I were the devil - And I don't like to say that too readily. I don't want to show any special gift of impersonating the adversary. Although one year our Week of Prayer speaker didn't turn up when Elder Paul Heubach was the pastor. And so the president called him and said, "We have no speaker; we need to produce a

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Week of Prayer." So he came to the Division of Religion, and we divided up the week. We decided we would talk on, I believe in the Second Coming, I believe in this and that. And one was, I believe in the Devil. And Elder Heubach said, "Well, who's going to volunteer to speak on this? Umm. We probably should have someone who's full of the subject." And guess who spoke on I Believe in the Devil on Friday night!

I was looking at the notes just today on that very subject. I believe in the devil; I do believe in the devil. And I think we can know enough about the devil - he was smart enough, when he was cast out of Heaven, to choose the least experienced place. More than that, I believe that his jealousy was over the creation of this planet. And so he came to this planet in order to make it as ugly as possible and throw it back in God's face. I think that it's part of his plan. He deliberately chose this. We had the misfortune to be born here.

I think that's why God's so fair. And Ellen White makes the extraordinary statement, that in a sense we will even be higher than the angels. Who wants to be higher? I think it's just that in the natural course of events, because we've lived here, we've lived where the battle has been fought for so many years, we've lived where the answer was given, we know first-hand what it's like to be in one condition, and then led to trust God, and what the evidence is like.

Remember the hymn, "When we sing redemption's story, angels will fold their wings," and so on? We used to sing that so often, and I didn't think of the meaning much. If you like to speak of God, if it's a privilege to talk about Him, some of us will be in a position to do this better than anybody else, better than the angels - that's a privilege. Moses— what a job you'll be able to do, and others.

So I think that the bad luck will turn into good luck, you know, if we survive.

Comment: If God is the Creator, and since He's the Creator and truly creative and He's created us in His image, if He also has complete foreknowledge, are you saying it's impossible to do anything to surprise God? that none of the decisions we make surprise Him?

Maxwell: Well, this is an interesting thing. This again raises the question of does God get bored because He can't be surprised?

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Even those who think that God perhaps cannot foresee our moral choices, allow that He can see every other one. So when you create a beautiful poem, there's no moral choice in this; you can't surprise Him with a poem, or a painting, or a sculpture. Or, I mean, what can you surprise Him on? So in a way, He is stuck, isn't He, with a boring situation.

So I don't know how to answer that. How do you surprise the Infinite One? And is He bored if there are no surprises? I see once again, we're having trouble handling infinity -

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which is one of the weaknesses of the human race. So I'd rather leave that. I love a little sanctified speculation about it, you know. It peaks one's interest. I think it's all right to do. But I always find I have to back away from it and say, "God, I don't know how You do this anyway. I hope You're not bored." I doubt He his. Look at the feelings that are expressed in Scripture about things.

We now have six grandchildren, going on seven. And you know, they all begin to walk at the same time, and it's really the same thing. But when each baby takes it's first step, you'd think we discovered America, you know! Tremendous! "Look what he's doing!"

I like to be complimented for just taking a step. That's appropriate at that time. It's predictable, and looks the same, but oh, it's magnificent every time. So I think though God foreknows what we're going to do, when the time actually comes, I can imagine Him deriving great satisfaction from it now happening. Just as He foreknew the suffering of His Son, that when the time came, He's pictured as really suffering with His Son.

So I'd rather leave it there. And I think our human experience - we're advised to look at human experience as an example, you know, that we learn from. So I think we can look to the family as an example of an answer to that question, maybe.

Venden: There was a hand back here.

Comment: You said something about trusting in God because of the evidence that we have, and sort of discounting that blind faith. And yet Christ says very clearly to Thomas, "Blessed is he who believes and has not seen." And so I wonder how you reconcile those two ideas.

Maxwell: That's a superb example. You know, He said to Thomas, who felt the marks, you know, "Blessed are you because you believe because of this evidence. But more blessed are those who don't base their faith on such very, very inadequate evidence." I believe that marks in the hands and the side are the poorest kind of evidence - a good plastic surgeon could do it. And I think that to base one's faith on that kind of thing - that was a leap of faith, it really was.

But for us to look over all the evidence of the years, and say, "On this we base our faith," now that's a much better basis. Happy are those who'll base their faith on something much more substantial than marks on the body, it seems to me. That's the way I understand it. How do you feel? That wasn't the best evidence. Jim Jones could have faked it.

Venden: But weren't the appearances of some importance, Graham?

Maxwell: You mean that He appeared miraculously?

Venden: Well, no, that Jesus was with His disciples after His death on the cross.

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Maxwell: Well, see, the better evidence was they'd been with Him all along. That's the reason for trusting Him.

Comment: I would agree with you if I thought that the marks on Jesus' side had any possibility at all of being forged. But since I don't, I think that for Thomas, the reason Christ did that was because that was the only evidence he would accept. But Christ was hoping more from Thomas than that.

Maxwell: You mean you don't think God would allow them to be forged. You haven't read about the stigmata. . .

Comment: I think He would allow them. I just personally don't believe that they were forged. I think they were . . .

Maxwell: Oh, no! I believe that Jesus was really there. Oh, by all means! And He said, "Put your hands in My side and feel." By all means! Oh, yes! And I'd be very impressed with that. But that's not the supreme evidence, or [else] you could win the great controversy with that kind of evidence. That's not the best kind of evidence. That's more like the evidence of floating axheads, and all the miracles in the Bible. And I believe the miracles. Sure, they're all evidence. But the supreme evidence is much greater than that. So that's what He meant. It wasn't, "Happy are those who'll believe without any evidence." That would be like saying, God will gather all the saints at the end and say, "You're the people I've been waiting for; you're all willing to trust Me without having any evidence for trusting Me. You're all willing to take a leap in the dark and trust Me." That's not very safe.

So I wouldn't want to exalt faith based on less evidence as a greater faith than faith based on more evidence. That's the thing.

Comment: I guess where I'm stumbling then, is what you call evidence vs. what Thomas perceived as evidence. You're differentiating Thomas's rather minuscule evidence of touching Him from this greater evidence; and I'm not sure I understand what you mean by that.

Maxwell: Well, with Thomas, that was very helpful to him. That's what he needed. He was given what he needed. "Touch Me; feel Me." And it was Christ. And everything else about Him — Christ's voice and manner and all the rest fit in. And Jesus said, "I'm pleased. But happy are those who will not be able to touch Me and see Me and feel Me, and will still believe." He didn't mean, "Happy are those who will be willing to believe on less evidence." It's not a virtue to believe on less evidence. You might follow Jim Jones. That was the only thing I sensed what you were saying.

Now, I don't want to minimize what he got that night; I'd like to have that. I'd like it too.

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Venden: I think that's very helpful, Graham. You're saying that Jesus isn't saying, "He believes on this evidence; I wish you'd believe without any evidence." He's saying, "better evidence."

Maxwell: Yes. Better evidence. But we won't have that, you know. We're going to be like poor Job. He didn't seem to get any. Yes, right with you.

Comment: Is Satan able to know our unspoken thoughts?

Maxwell: Well, we have an indication that he cannot read our thoughts. But some of us seem to show amazing ability to do this. Look what wives can do to their husbands. So, uh. And my mother could do to me, which wasn't fair, I thought. But, do you want an illustration of this?

Comment: Yes, I do.

Maxwell: Ellen White makes the comment: If you're planning some special meetings, don't take too long bringing your plans to fruition, or you'll give the devil time to thwart your plans. These Conversations about God have developed so quickly, it's been almost breathtaking. Some people haven't had much sleep for a long time. It took four days to build that beautiful backdrop; a physician built that whole thing; it's just marvelous. And if you see all the other things that have been done so quickly. And I was saying to my wife as I left, I'm feeling rather breathless about plunging into this now. And she remembered, "Maybe it's a good thing we've done this so quickly. The devil hasn't had time to catch up and thwart our plans." Then I thought for a moment maybe he was succeeding tonight, you know. Be prepared any one of these Friday nights, to the extent that we might really be speaking to the truth about God, that we'll have problems. Sure.

So, we do have indication that he has limitations; he also has immense ability, immense insight. But to read our thoughts, I compare that with the need of the angels, who also cannot read our thoughts, to hear Christ's diagnosis of our hearts in the Investigative Judgement.

You see, there would be no need to do that, if they could read our hearts. But they turn to Him in trust, and He says, "This man's record is terrible; but he has a new heart and a right spirit, and it's for real." And Christ is the One who can say that for us.

So I believe there are some thoughts and feelings in the innermost recesses that only God can read, though we do have recording angels, to be sure.

My worry is, he [Satan] can read too well. I'd rather leave it at that. He's such a shrewd student of human nature, that he can pretty well tell what's going on. So, I wouldn't derive comfort from his limitations too much. Just a thought.

Comment: Just a comment on— a brother over here was saying awhile ago about

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God's foreknowledge and hindsight and all that. God knows the future and knows the past, but He lives in the present. He said, "I AM that I AM." And He's not worried about what we're doing to the future. He's worried about what we're doing right now, and He takes pleasure in that.

Maxwell: Say, you raised a very interesting thing, though. When God appeared at the burning bush, and Moses said, "Who shall I say You are?" He said, "My name is I AM." Well now, in the Hebrew, that doesn't mean just "now"; The I AM means the One who always is. You know, in Greek and Hebrew it's continuous.

And so when Moffat came to this - and I wish people hadn't forgot about Moffat. It's terrible, these great men and their works are forgotten. Moffat's translation was great. My father loved Moffat because he was so, you know, dynamic and dramatic. Moffat always translates the I AM, and also Yahweh, as The Eternal, you see. The One who was, and is, and shall always be. That's the Alpha and the Omega. By the way, Omega is used first of virtue, before it's used in the opposite. So let's not let Omega always to connote evil. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega.

So I would rather say, the past, the present and the future are all as one. But as far as we're concerned, He's with us right now. That's all we can handle.

Venden: All right, we have one question here, and then we'll come to this gentleman here.

Comment: When is the proper time to call out the evil spirit of someone who is possessed?

Maxwell: Ah, that's an interesting question there. You remember, the disciples were trying, and it wasn't working very well, and Jesus came and showed them how.

Venden: That's a very important question.

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: It does take us a bit down another path, but . . .

Maxwell: What I'm thinking of right now is . . .

KEN - USING A DIFFERENT TRANSCRIBING MACHINE HERE

Comment: [Cover this sometime] in your future discussions would you, Graham?

Maxwell: I think it would fit in, in a number of places. I think in one way, not quite the direct way, it fits in to what we're going to see near the end. We're going to see everything. And we're going to see this sort of thing. And it might be done rightly, and it might be done wrongly. I think we see a lot of it done wrongly right now - very wrongly.

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And I'm so impressed that Oral Roberts has received God's call to go back to faith healing and the exorcising of demons. And on T.V. just a few weeks ago, I watched Oral Roberts exorcising demons on T.V. And it was extraordinary.

He said, "If you are ill, you have a certain demon in you. You have many, many demons in you. I can name those demons. I can talk to those demons." And he called a lady out and told her what demons were in her. And he began calling them out, and it makes the prickles go up your spine, as he did it. Because along with that, his son stood beside him, and confirmed what the father was doing, because he began talking to God, on the platform. And he says, "Yes, God? What is that, God? Yes?" And God's was telling him exactly what to say and what to do.

You see, when you have two men standing on the platform before a huge crowd; and one is talking directly to God, and the other is showing control over the demons; and the two of them say, "We have this word from God as to the following theological matters:" their authority is almost irresistible, unless we are very, very skeptical of that kind of thing. And skeptical doesn't mean that we're negative. Skeptical just means you have the eye wide open.

You know, all Christians should be skeptics, or we'll be deceived. We ought not think of a skeptic as an unbeliever. No, a skeptic is a person who has his eyes wide open. So we need to go into the time of trouble as cautious skeptics.

And since there's a lot of this going on along right now, my eyes are wide open to see. I would want to be extremely cautious about that.

Venden: It seems to me, that what we're endeavoring to do in this series, Graham, is foundational. What are the issues? If we're not clear on that, then we can go many different ways. But once we get that settled, that provides a safe way - I say settled, when we get the perspective clearly in mind - it may be very important.

Maxwell: And I'll understand that if I am progressing in knowing God, and becoming settled into the truth, He might let me be exposed to some of those things.

Comment: In other words, if our trust is complete then we can do that?

M. If trust is complete, we will wait on the Lord to tell when to do it and how. I would rather leave it that way. And before doing something that involves the supernatural, I almost need a telephone call from On High, you know. I don't think we can assign ourselves to go do it. I'd be scared.

Comment: Whenever he's talking about in the Bible, there's always a duality, not only of the person who is doing the exorcising being ready, but the person who is going to be exorcised, who wants to be exorcised, or to be in an open situation. Whenever he did it, it seems that people he exorcised were willing. I don't think he forces. . .

Maxwell: Well one thing— I would have no hesitation about commending somebody

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who may be in a condition I can't diagnose, whether it's a demon or not, commending them to God and leaving it up to Him to do it. But I think some would step a little further, almost into His shoes, and start ordering the devil around. I get scared by that most of the time.

Venden: You had a question?

Comment: Yeah, going back to foreknowledge: I was just thinking that maybe we sometimes view His foreknowledge to limit Him to that; to think that He's constantly seeing everything and has not the ability to maybe shut out the future or the past. . .

Maxwell: If he should want to, of course.

Comment: Yeah, and that's something I was wondering, is that maybe sometimes in studying or wondering about his foreknowledge, that maybe we [limit] Him to that and allow him no latitude.

Maxwell: Well, I think the real problem of the foreknowledge, is with many, it's assumed that if God has foreknown something, He's predestined it and it has to happen. And that's why so many of our really good Christian friends - not talking about Seventh-day Adventists only. I mean, the greater number of God's true people are in the other communions, we've been told. I hope we often associate with them — These very devout folk equate foreknowledge with predestination.

One of the nicest men I have ever known - he and his wife shared the other half of our miserable, bedbug- cockroach-ridden apartment in Chicago. But no complaints; we had two bedrooms, and half a bathroom, and a dining room and a sitting room, fully furnished, with all utilities, for \$34.00 a month. That was 1945 when I got to Chicago. Well, in the other half, sharing our miserable bathroom and the bugs, was the most distinguished gentleman, Robert V. Moss [sp?] and his marvelous wife, whose father was the president of Katorba College for Girls. I mean, oh, she was a cultivated person, with the most beautiful Southern accent I've ever heard. And we talked religion many, many, many times. He never could see, but that foreknowledge would require predestination, in his view, you see.

When he graduated, he became president of the Evangelical and Reform Theological Seminary. Then when they were united with the Disciples of Christ, he became the leader of that whole united group, became an officer of the World Council of Churches; died a little while ago of cancer, very regrettably. He was one of the nicest men I've ever known. He knew Adventism so well, that one time without forewarning his wife at a social event, he defended Adventism. And she got more and more and more worried. She said, "I've lost my husband; how will I explain it?" you know. And afterwards she said, "Have you left and become an Adventist?"

"No," he said, "but wouldn't you want me to do a fair job when I represent Adventism?" That's how well he knew us. But when we left, he shook my hand and said, "We

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separate now - you, a seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Adventist, and I a first-day realized eschatologist." But he said, "Let's keep in touch."

And I don't think he ever resolved this problem. If God foreknows, it means because He's controlling it; that's the only way He can foreknow. See, I feel, I don't know how He foreknows, but He doesn't have to control to foreknow. He can't foreknow something that doesn't happen. He doesn't make it happen because He foreknows. He knows it's going to happen. I don't know how He does it.

But to show you about this man. I saw him several times thereafter. One day, as we drove in the car from San Francisco up to PUC, I said, "Have you had any new insights theologically?"

He said, "I've just written a book on Paul." He said, "You know I believe in the immortality of the soul; that's one of our differences. But I will concede to you, Paul did not— I cannot find the immortality of the soul anywhere in Paul's writings. What am I going to do about that?" Because he says, "The soul is so precious. There must be something beyond this life." And he died.

I'm betting on seeing Robert B. Moss in the hereafter. Because if he's admitted into the hereafter and sees us there, he'll say, "What do you know, Graham? You were right; and I'm glad you were. I like this."

That's the thing; that's why I believe we can really make friends with other people who are not members of our faith as we have trouble with predestination, you know, and these other matters. They shouldn't stand between us and God.

Venden: Yes.

Comment: I'm not an Adventist, and I'm wondering about - you were talking about - keeping these issues straight. And I'm interested in what you feel are the issues we need to keep straight, in order to share that Kingdom [?].

G: Oh, that would be well. Most Christians agree as they look through all of Scripture, that all God asks of us is faith, or trust, or whatever word we want to use. Because if we really trusted Him enough, to be willing to stand humbly in His presence and ask, "What must we do to be well?" If we trust Him, he can readily heal all the damage done. So, as soon as He's won us all to trust, all would be well; He could even admit us to the Kingdom like the thief on the cross. The thief on the cross died in faith. And he will arise still trusting the One in the middle. He may need a lot of work done to him, but that's no problem. If I have an accident on the way home tonight, I hope I die God's trusting patient. Because I would arise His trusting patient, and He could do whatever needs to be done. We could even skip all the details as to what needs to be done. If I really trust Him, all's well.

Like the jailer, you know, said in the middle of the earthquake, "What must I do to be

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saved?" And Paul said, "In the middle of the earthquake is no time for twenty Conversations about God. Let me sum it all up: Place your faith in Jesus Christ, and all will be well." And the man liked that, and he took Paul home and made him comfortable — and Silas. And they had a lot of Bible study, it says, afterwards.

But what followed afterwards, none of it was more important than the first statement. So the main question is: God will save all who trust Him, but He doesn't ask us to trust Him as a stranger. It isn't safe. And therefore, God at great cost and with infinite patience, has revealed the truth about Himself. Not in claims - the devil can make those - but in actual demonstrations.

Well, I wouldn't know about that if we didn't have the Bible. So this is what we all share together. So I read the Bible not so much as a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned. I like to read the Bible as a record of God's demonstration of the truth about Himself, right from the Garden of Eden on through. And I like what I see. Even the problems— having done it enough now, there aren't that many left. Because the more difficult problems in the Bible turn out to be the most potent. Because when God behaves in His incredibly trustworthy manner, under difficult circumstances, I'm more impressed than when He behaves beautifully under favorable circumstances.

And that's why the Bible has so many difficult stories. Judges: The way God behaved in the days of the judges is overwhelming. The people were terrible. But He looks great. And the thing is, we don't read the Bible so much to learn about people, as to learn about God. The only dependable, consistent hero in the Bible is God. Even Moses let Him down. And yes, He did do wonderful things with those people. I'm pleased to see how Moses grew, and Job grew, and others. But I don't look to them so much. I like to see how God revealed Himself in dealing with those people.

So, it's the truth about God. I like to read the Bible, and always ask of every story, every teaching, every event, "What does this tell me about God?" And that's why I like to go through book-by-book. And we've done it so many, many times. And I look forward every year to doing it again. Doing it four times this year, with four different groups.

That's where the evidence is. It is really in the Bible. Without it, what would we know? And yet so many read, you know, here a little and there a little. But when you take "little's" you're picking them. Who tells you which one to pick? So every church has its collection of littles. You know, we Adventists have our collection, and maybe your church has its collections. And each church thinks it has the best collection of littles.

I think the most persuasive position is to say, We're through collecting littles. We come with the entire Bible. It's yours as much as ours. Why don't we go through it together? Not even read a book about the Bible. Nor read a systematic theology that is the result of somebody else's choosing the littles. I would rather take the Bible, and go all the way through it - with other people, so I won't skip company or maybe lead myself astray.

And I believe the Bible is that understandable, that anybody can really see the truth

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about God in it. And of course, if you're out here much, you hear about Ellen White, who has helped so many of us. She takes the view, you know, that the Bible was not written for the scholar. It was written for the common people. In fact, the common people as led by the Holy Spirit, are perhaps more likely to arrive at truth than the sophisticated scholar. You see — you know — He has many pressures and other influences.

When Jesus taught, He taught so simply. When you read Gospel, isn't that the simplest part of the Bible? So no one has to go to the dictionary to understand Jesus. He doesn't even use words like "sanctification," "propitiation," "expiation." He doesn't use any of those. Of course, Paul doesn't either, you know. But Jesus particularly stayed away from those terms.

So Ellen White loves to say: Jesus, when He was through explaining the truth, no one had to consult the dictionary or even the learned doctors to discover the truth and the meaning of the words that fell from the lips of the greatest Teacher who ever lived.

So I think the best thing we could do, is to join with the Bible Societies and everybody else, in making the Bible available. Dr. Taylor is doing a marvelous work for Tyndale Publishing. Making the Bible available in very attractive form. Maybe you don't like the Living Bible. Well, you can't fault a man who is almost giving the stuff away to the world, that people can read it and understand it.

And then our next thing would be, to be like Phillip, who got up into the chariot, you know, with the eunuch. He had the Bible, but he didn't know what to do with it.

The next thing is to help people understand. So we would be safe, if you take the whole Bible, and you're willing to follow it wherever it may lead, and I'm willing to do the same, we will arrive at the same place.

Venden: Graham, I think we'd better call time at this point. We'll have other weeks ahead.

I wanted to come back to this lady's question: We covered many areas, there. If I understood you correctly, perhaps the beginning point was tonight's presentation.

Maxwell: That's all it was— an introduction.

Venden: A perspective on [all the topics]. So I hope that at least helps in the pilgrimage for all of us.

Maxwell: Well, we'll do it out of the Bible as a whole. That will be the method.

Venden: Why don't you lead us in a word a prayer. But just before you do, I'd like to say Thank you to those who worked to provide the little drink. And some folks made cookies today - a good share of the day - to give just a bit of refreshment.

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Maxwell: I hope there's one left. My wife made some, and they looked really good.

Venden: We'll be looking for you next Friday night, both in the sanctuary and in here. Why don't you ask God's benediction.

Maxwell: Our loving Father in Heaven, There are few pleasures so great as to meet with others to love and admire Thee and Thy wise and gracious ways, and yet who would like Thee more. It has really been a privilege this evening to meet with friends who do not have to be here, but who find great pleasure in speaking of Thee, and sharing their convictions with others.

We don't know each other yet, all of us, in this room, but Thou dost know us. We are all members of Thy family. Make us better friends. Help us to know each other better. Most of all, to know Thee better, and thus to be willing to follow Thee and to listen to Thee, allow Thee to heal all the damage done, and restore to us all the beauties way back in the beginning - the peace, and the freedom, and the security.

Lead us all, that we may all be together there. Amen.