

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER TWO - 2
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER TWO
WHAT WENT WRONG IN GOD'S UNIVERSE?

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Number Two: "What Went Wrong In God's Universe?"--another look at sin and its consequences in the larger setting of the Great Controversy over God's character and His government.

The Bible describes sin as more than a mere breaking of the rules. Sin involves a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen. Left untreated, sin makes peace impossible. To set and keep things right, trust must somehow be restored. God sent His Son "to deal with sin".

Welcome to the second of our *Conversations About God*--another look at our Heavenly Father in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government. You recall that last Friday evening, if you were here, we considered again this controversy--this war--that broke out in heaven as described in Rev. 12. This conflict began right within God's own family in His very presence, in the mind of the one who was such an honored and trusted angel. Now our question this evening is, **What really went wrong in God's universe?** I believe that to understand what went wrong helps us to understand the reason behind the methods God has used to put right the things that have gone wrong. These methods are often referred to as the *Plan of Salvation*. As we discussed last week, we are so accustomed to thinking of the plan of salvation as God's gracious provisions to save you and me and other sinners on this planet. But, **in the larger view of the great controversy, the plan of salvation is God's way of setting right what went wrong and setting it right in such a way that it will never go wrong again.**

But now, what really did go wrong? Well it helps to consider what made things go right, and so right, before the war began. Before the war there was peace; 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. Where there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, perfect security.

But a crisis of distrust developed in the family. And as we reviewed last time, our heavenly Father has been accused of being unworthy of our trust--particularly of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. Thus sin entered our universe for the very first time, for the Bible describes sin, in its very essence, as a violation of mutual trust. Sin is much more than a mere breaking of the rules, as serious as that might be. Repeatedly, throughout the Bible, sin is described and illustrated, as a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness--a suspicious and stubborn unwillingness to listen to the One who is so eager to help us in our predicament.

But doesn't the Bible specifically state that sin is breaking the rules? How about the key text that we have learned from childhood up, 1 John 3:4 (KJV), "Sin is the transgression of the law". Actually, that is a rather free translation. Not all free translations are in *The Living Bible*, there are some in the *King James Version* and this is one of them. The Greek word that John used (if you will forgive pronouncing the Greek) is **anomia**, and it means literally: lawlessness or rebelliousness. In other words, sin is described as a state of mind. Anyone in that state of mind is a continuing threat to the peace and security of the family. I would say that sin has not been dealt with until our lawlessness has either been changed, or eliminated. That is why I chose the translation that I did. Notice 1 John 3:4 (Williams), "Everyone who commits sin, commits

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lawlessness.” That is precisely the word! Sin is lawlessness.

Now the hazard of regarding sin as primarily a breaking of the rules is that it tends to encourage an impersonal, even fearful relationship with our God, and this is what He wishes to eliminate. If we regard sin as primarily a breaking of the rules, God’s commandments may regrettably be misunderstood as arbitrary regulations designed to show His authority and to test our willingness to obey. If we obey, we are rewarded. If we disobey, we are destroyed. Do you want to live under those circumstances?

Well, since we all have sinned, should we be fearfully awaiting the execution of the sentence? Unless, perchance, God should find some legal way to give us yet another chance. And if we turn down that second chance, boy will He punish us with even greater severity for our ingratitude. Would this understanding help produce the peace, the freedom, and freedom from fear that God desires so much in His universal family?

Actually though, when rightly understand, we *can* say that sin is a breaking of the rules. But look again at the rules? Look at God’s commandments--the ten in particular, the decalogue. All those ten commandments require is that we love God, and we love each other. And if we really did that we would have peace and freedom. (see Matt. 22:34-40; cf. Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) In fact, the tenth of the ten commandments says that we should not even want to sin (see Rom. 7:7-25 etc). If we live together in that state of mind, not even wanting to do anything unloving, we would have freedom, to be sure, and all kinds of peace and goodwill.

But, *can* love be commanded or produced by force or fear? To put it vividly, has God said to us children, “You either love Me, and each other, or I’ll have to kill you! Do I make Myself clear!” Have you husbands ever tried that on your wives and children? Did it work? If you husbands should see you wives and children standing trembling in front of you and all saying in unison, “Oh yes, Daddy we love you very much”, would you be pleased? Would you be satisfied? Then you’re a brute! And the God that some of us worship would never settle for that.

Now we all must admit that the Bible is full of references to law, and discipline and punishment and rewards--even final, fiery destruction. And since our purpose during this series is always to take the Bible as a whole, and not “here a little and there a little”, but everything in the scriptures, we must look at all these other passages. And so we shall. In fact, we will spend several sessions on God’s wide use of law, and why Jesus indeed, had to die, and how “God’s law is no threat to our freedom.” To understand that is really to learn the truth that sets us free.

But going back to the beginning, sin entered our universe when angels ceased to trust, and as a consequence they themselves became untrustworthy. Hence, all the other passages about sin in scripture. Look at James 4:17 (RSV). That’s a familiar definition. “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” It is rebellious or lawless to act in that way. A man who behaves like that is a cheat. He is certainly not trustworthy to have around in a free universe. Compare Romans 14:23 (Moffatt), “Any action that is not based on faith is a sin.” Or RSV, “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Or Phillips, “When we act apart from our faith we sin.” Compare the verses in Ezra when the Jews were confessing (having come back from Babylonian captivity) that they had done several things they should not have done. They described these misbehaviors in these words recorded in Ezra 10:2 (RSV), “We have broken faith with our God.” Or NIV, “We have been unfaithful to our God.” This suggests once again that the essence of sin is a breach of faith--it’s a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness.

One of the most impressive illustrations of sin as a violation of trust involves the great saint Moses. I don’t know of a greater illustration in the whole Bible. You remember when the people of Israel were complaining about the lack of water, and they came to Moses and they grumbled. (see Num. 20) They even said they wished they had died in the wilderness. “Why did you bring

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us here from Egypt? We have no water.” And they behaved so badly that Moses ran to God and prayed, “God, what shall I do?” And God said, “Give them water. Take your rod and go and speak to the rock this time. Don’t hit it. Don’t make a scene. Don’t be angry with the people. Don’t even condemn them. Just speak to the rock and they will have all the water they want.” But Moses went back to the rock and stood there, and striking it smartly, he said, “You ungrateful rebels, must we bring forth water from this rock?” And God’s response is found in Num. 20:12 (NIV), “But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land that I give them.’” Now isn’t that being a bit arbitrary and severe? All the old man had done was to get irritated and impatient. He disobeyed God and hit the rock with his rod. Is that enough to keep him out of the promised land? For forty years he had led the people. Just think of what he put up with those forty years. And God says, “Because of what you did at the rock, you may not take this people in.” Does that seem severe to you?--for God to treat His old friend like that? How could what Moses did be serious enough to call for such, in his eyes, a terrible consequence or penalty? Moses begged God, “Please, please may I take the people in,” until finally God said, “speak to Me no more about this matter.” (Deut. 3:21-29, esp. 26)

Or is the answer right in the text that we read? It doesn’t say in Numbers 20:12 (NIV), “because you disobeyed me, you may not take the people in.” The Lord said, “Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites” you may not bring the people in. You see, Moses had been, probably, the best friend that God had ever had on this earth. God even talked to him face to face. This is even different from the way God talks to a prophet--in visions and dreams. Later (Deut.34:10) He said, “Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew (and talked to) face to face,” (parentheses supplied) as a man speaks to his friend. The people knew that Moses had a special relationship with God, and they revered him, at least when they were behaving. They had seen him go up on Sinai and come down carrying the ten commandments.

If your pastor came down from a nearby mountain carrying the ten commandments, and with his face shining so brightly that you couldn’t look at him, wouldn’t he have increased influence on his congregation? Moses had enormous influence. This is what made Moses’ behavior at the rock so serious. He had pictured God as if He were angry with the people when He was not. God had wished by His kindness to lead some of those Israelites to repentance (Rom. 2:4) Thus Moses misrepresented God and deprived God of that opportunity.

The children of Israel, standing as they were on the edge of the land of Canaan, getting ready to go in and approach those well-armed tribes, needed to trust God very closely. God purposed to win them. With all their complaining and grumbling He was not going to condemn them, just give them abundant water. “Moses”, He said, “Don’t even strike the rock this time. Moses, by contrast, pictured God as angry with them.

What a contrast with the way Moses had behaved once earlier (see Ex. 32:11,12) when God said, “I’m tired of these people, step aside and let Me destroy them, and I’ll make a great nation of you.” Moses said, “God, You couldn’t do that! Think what it would do to Your reputation. What would the Egyptians think--that You couldn’t take Your people into the promised land?” And I can imagine God saying, “I love to hear you say that Moses. Who knows Me as well as you do? You really are My friend.”

But now, under pressure, Moses let God down. He misrepresented God as vengeful, unforgiving and severe. And that was precisely Satan’s sin back in the beginning--the sin that is the most devastating sin of all. Now God has honored His friend Moses ever since. He personally buried him (Deut. 34:6) resurrected him (cf. Jude 9 & Mark 9:2-4) and took him to heaven, and then later sent him down to encourage His own Son when He was here being tested on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). But God had to go on record in the eyes of the onlooking universe as to the terrible seriousness of Moses’ sin. It wasn’t just that Moses had

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disobeyed, or by smiting the rock he had spoiled a symbol, although he had to be sure.

Moses had broken faith with God. Moses had failed to show himself to be God's trusting and trustworthy friend, and that is the essence of sin. How many of us do you think have committed the same sin? How many of us have hurt our own children and others who trust us to tell them the truth about God? Have you apologized lately to God for ever putting Him in a bad light, suggesting that He is not the kind of Person that we really should know Him to be? Moses repented as we know, and became a better friend of God than ever before.

But so many people have continued to distrust. What happens? What are the results? Not what are the penalties but what are the **results** of centuries of rebellion and distrust? Well, look at Romans 3:10-18 (GNB). What makes this quotation so significant is that it's made up of six Old Testament passages--one from Isaiah, and five from the Psalms.

As the Scriptures say: 'There is no one who is righteous, no one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God; they have all gone wrong; no one does what is right, not even one. Their words are full of deadly deceit; wicked lies roll off their tongues, and dangerous threats, like snake's poison, from their lips; their speech is filled with bitter curses. They are quick to hurt and kill; they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go. They have not known the path of peace, nor have they learned reverence for God.

Then, going right on into Romans 1:21-24, and then 28-32. (GNB) Paul says

"They know God, (He says there's no excuse if you don't know God; He's revealed Himself) but they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They say they are wise, but they are fools; instead of worshipping the immortal God, they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. . ." (parentheses supplied) The Egyptians even worshipped crocodiles, and beetles. Think what that does to a person. We will study this on a later evening, but Hosea says in a text I didn't include tonight, "It is a law that we become like the object of our worship." His exact words are: "When Israel came to Mount Peor, they began to worship Baal, and soon became as disgusting as the gods they loved." (see Hosea 9:10 GNB) That's the devastating consequence of worshipping a false picture of God.

How God has tried to keep in touch, but how unwilling we have been to listen. Look at the rest of Romans 1:21-24 (GNB)

"Because those people refused to keep in mind the true knowledge about God," (in fact, in verse 25 of that same chapter, it says "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie," and you know who the father of lies is. And so) ". . . he (God) has given them over to corrupted minds, so that they do the things that they should not do. They are filled with all kinds of wickedness, evil, greed, and vice; they are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit, and malice. They gossip (no peace-lovers will gossip. The Bible says, to our comfort, there will be no gossips there. They gossip) and speak evil of one another; they are hateful to God, insolent, proud and boastful; they think of more ways to do evil; they disobey their parents; they have no conscience; they do not keep their promises (you can't trust such people) and they show no kindness or pity for others. They know that God's law says that people who live in this way deserve death. Yet, not only do they continue to do these very things, but they even approve of others who do them."

The stubbornness, the unwillingness to listen, is represented in that next verse from Hosea. This description is repeated many times in the Bible. Hosea 4:16,17 (Phillips)

"Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer. How can the Lord feed them now like lambs in a broad meadow? Ephraim is wedded to idolatry, let him alone." And

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then, looking right on at some other verses. These are the consequences of not loving, trusting and admiring our God enough to be willing to listen and do things His way. Hosea 5:4 (Phillips) "For their spirit is steeped in unfaithfulness and they know nothing of the Lord."

Then, Hosea 4:1,12 (Phillips)

There is no honesty nor compassion nor knowledge of God . . . My people!
Asking advice from a piece of wood and consulting a staff for instructions!

Now this raises a significant point. How could it be said that Israel does not know God? I mean, who else knew God so well? Look at all the prophets and their marvelous pictures of God. Jeremiah said "I'm proud to know God as I do." (see Jeremiah 9:23,24) But the way many people knew God in those days, was not knowing God in the special Biblical sense--that is, to know God as a Friend, even to know God intimately, as a husband and a wife know each other. The Bible says, "Adam knew Eve his wife," (Gen. 4:1) and as a result, they didn't learn each other's names--they had a baby. Elsewhere God says of Israel "Thee only have I known." (Amos 3:2) He knew all the rest, but He knew Israel in a special way. And when those disappointed saints find that they are not acceptable in the kingdom, and they plead "Lord, Lord, open unto us," He says "Go away, I never knew you." (see Matt. 7:21-23; cf. 25:11) Why, He knew the hairs on their head (see Matt. 10:30), but He didn't know them as friends, and friendship is the very essence of the relationship God desires to have with His people. If Israel had really known God, they would have been better friends, they would have been jealous for His reputation, and they would have been better people themselves, as were the wonderful prophets in the Old Testament who wrote so well of God.

One of the ultimate results of believing Satan's lies, and as a result, not trusting God and allowing Him to heal us, is found in the familiar verse: Romans 6:23. "Sin pays its servants; the wage is death." Or in the *Good News Bible*, "For sin pays its wage--death." You see, we cannot make it on our own. Not until "God breathed into man the breath of life, did man begin to live." That's an excellent translation of Genesis 2:7 (NEB). You see, we're still dependent on God for life. We are not gods. We are just created beings. God hopes we won't find that too humiliating. He won't rub it in. He even treats us as "gods" it suggests in the Psalms (see 82:6). He even speaks of us as brothers of His Son. But we are still created beings. Do you mind? And it makes good sense, therefore, to listen very closely to the One who made us.

To pretend to be a "god" was Satan's insane idea, and look what it's done for him. So millions of angels and men have broken faith with God, and they've shown that they themselves cannot be trusted. But has this changed our God? Can God still be trusted? Specifically, can God be trusted to even want us, to **still** even want us to come back? Is God the kind of God who could be trusted to pay any price to win us back? Ah, that question stirred the Apostle Paul, and he wrote Romans 3:4 (NIV) "What if some of them did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all." Some versions say "Certainly not"; "by no means"; "God forbid." And we have the whole biblical record of all that God has done to set right what has gone wrong. He even sent His Son to deal with sin. Look at Romans 8:3 (GNB) "What the Law could not do. . . God did. . . by sending his own Son. . . to do away with sin." Or in the *Jerusalem Bible*. "God dealt with sin by sending his own Son." Now, what does it mean to deal with sin? If sin is distrust and its consequences, forgiveness alone will not heal the damage done. Forgiveness does not do away with sin. For there to be lasting peace in God's universe, trust must somehow be restored. Questions must be answered. Satan's accusations must be met, and God must be seen to be righteous and infinitely worthy of our trust. And so Christ came to set things right, and that's why He died, as we will spend a whole evening considering.

Look at Romans 5:1 (GNB). "Now that we have been *put right* with God by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Put right"; or "Set right". Do you know what the Greek word is behind that? It's the word that's usually translated "justified." I love the translation

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“put right,” and we’ll consider that more later on.

Well, there are at least three ways of looking at what went wrong in God’s universe. I’d like to mention these as a basis for our continuing discussion, and God looks different from these three perspectives:

A very widely-held view, beyond the bounds of Christianity, is this:

1. **“Because we have broken God’s rules, we have offended Him, and He is very angry with us. Can anything be done to assuage His anger, and appease His wrath, so that somehow He can find it in His heart to forgive us, and not destroy us, and bless us once again.”**

There’s another view that is widely held, sometimes within the bounds of Christianity.

2. **“We have broken God’s rules, and thus we are in serious legal trouble. Law and justice demand that God should destroy us, or even torture us for eternity. Can anything be done to make it legally possible for God to forgive us and not destroy us, and still be just, even appear to be just, in His Own eyes and in the eyes of the onlooking universe?”**

Then there’s a third view, not widely held on this planet, but I believe this is the most widely held view throughout the universe. If it isn’t God has not won the war, and there is no basis for lasting peace. It is this:

3. **“We *have* sinned. We have allowed ourselves to be deceived by Satan’s lies, and so we have turned away from the true God to many substitutes, and the results have been disastrous. Left alone, we all would die. Is there any way that Satan’s lies can be corrected? Is there any way that the truth about God and His government can be made crystal clear? Is there any way that unquestionable evidence can be provided that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be? Is there any way some of us rebels can be won back to trust, and so be saved and healed? God can and will save all who trust Him. That’s why all God asks of us is trust.**

Could I ask you: Which one of these three views do you prefer? Which one of these Gods do you prefer? Which one would you rather live with for eternity? Or does it really make any difference?

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April 25, 2007

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QUESTIONS:

1. You said that the book of Revelation was written especially for the people who lived at that time. I have always been told that it has special relevance to the present day church instead. Can you explain?

I believe that it was written especially for those people. The Lord had not yet come; there was persecution and opposition. They needed the message of that book -- to look a little higher and see the larger view. They needed to realize that they were caught up in a great controversy, but God had already won the war. We need it too, because we live in a day when we are faced with the very same problems. We need precisely that message. Not so much a schedule of events etc., but the major message of that book -- look a little higher, take a larger view.

2. This great controversy arose because Satan questioned God's authority. Did any other angels question God before? If not, why not? Will they sometime in the future?

First of all, there is nothing wrong with asking questions. God invites us to ask questions, but Satan did so with rebelliousness and irreverence. This is what led to the war. There is no text that suggests that this had happened previously. The Bible just tells us a little bit. cf. John 21:25. It is enough for us to understand Lucifer's questioning rebellion and its consequences. Will this ever happen again? Reverent questions will continue to be raised for eternity, or else how could we learn. God is not afraid of such questioning. But the Bible suggests that evil will never rise again. Not that our freedom is taken away, but that a costly basis has been established so we may have answers. Jesus will always remain in His human form to remind us of all the answers that God gave. To rebel in the face of all this evidence would be totally foolish.

3. Did God give Satan a chance to repent?

There is no text that says He did. But couldn't you trust the God you know to give Satan ample time and all possible chances to repent? Isn't God unwilling "that any of His children should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9)? That's why He waits so long for us as discussed by Peter and Paul (see 2 Pet. 3; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Thess. 2). On the authority of the prodigal son story I would feel free to say that, had Satan repented, God would have fully reinstated him to his original position next to the throne of God Himself. When the prodigal came home the father said, "we don't have any second class sons in our family. You're either fully a son or not at all." That bothered the older brother. The father even gave him full access to the bank account -- that was what that ring was for -- to sign contracts.

4. How do you understand the word "church" in Ephesians 3:9,10?

Church has many meanings--the building, the organization, the 11 o'clock service, etc. But the original meaning was "those who respond to God's invitation". "Congregation" and "synagogue" have the same meaning. Thus it would include all who respond to God's call, no matter what their present condition may be. The church, in turn, has been given the responsibility of telling others. This is certainly not any one denomination. It is those who have come to trust God once again and thus enjoy the unity that springs from their faith. Ephesians 4:20

5. If God knew that Lucifer would bring sin into the universe why did He create him?

The Bible doesn't limit God's foreknowledge in any way, so God must have known that, when He created Lucifer, this would be the one who would eventually cause sin. But God also knew what He would do in response, and He was willing to pay the cost or price necessary. There was absolutely nothing wrong with God's creation. Lucifer was perfect. But God always allows full freedom to even rebel and spit in His face. (see Matt. 26:67 etc.)

6. Why do you feel that the tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden was the only place where Satan could tempt Adam and Eve?

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If Satan had been free to tempt them whenever and wherever he wanted, wouldn't he have gone to the tree of life? They had to come to the tree of life every day. The fact that he did not go to the tree of life or even follow them wherever they went throughout the garden, and only tempted them at the tree of knowledge of good and evil suggests that he was limited to that tree, although there is no text to prove it. Furthermore, Satan knew that our first parents had been told not to go there. Why do you think God told them not to go to that one particular tree?

7. Does evil exist to allow human beings to choose between good and bad, to have freedom of choice?

Paul dealt with that question in Romans (see 5:20 - 6:4). He points out that the worse we are, the more gracious God has been. He then goes the next step and asks "Why don't we be more evil so that God will look more gracious?" Immediately he responds to his own question by saying, "God forbid" or "What a ghastly thought!" If the blacker the backdrop, the more brilliant God's righteousness appears, then why not paint Him a blacker backdrop? Paul calls that a terrible thought. It is just that God has taken something bad and brought something good out of it.

8. If a person is sincere, but sincerely wrong, whose fault is that? And what will be the consequences?

If one sincerely takes the wrong path, one will sincerely arrive at the wrong destination. But, if we really are sincere, God has not left us in the dark. John 1:9; Rom 1:19,20; 2:14,15 So anyone on this planet who is sincerely seeking for truth will not be abandoned by God. If one is really sincere he will not wind up sincerely wrong. If one is sincerely wrong, he has been saying "no" to the truth and the evidence for a long time. Sincerity must include a willingness to learn. Sincerity cannot take the place of time spent searching God's word. True sincerity is humble and teachable.

9. What is the meaning of Hebrews 9:22 "without the shedding of blood there is no remission"?

The word remission here means simply forgiveness. It is not like the medical term remission. This text refers particularly to the ceremonial law. But the real answer to this question is understanding why Jesus had to die (see Conversations About God - Number Eight)

10. If we say that God has already won the war, what is God waiting for?

When Satan and his followers were cast out of heaven there was victory of a sort, but not much of one, because there were so many questions yet to be resolved. Peace had not been confirmed. Even the loyal angels had their questions. So what we might have considered a real victory, was no victory for our heavenly Father. But when Jesus died, He said, "It is finished". And apparently when He went up to heaven on resurrection Sunday, He found the rest of the universe celebrating--because He really had won the war. Revelation leaves no question.

They cannot praise Him enough. They understood the issues and they got the message. Down here, the three who were with Him in the garden of Gethsemane slept. They were afraid to come to the cross. By Sunday they were all off hiding in deep depression. So now God is waiting for us here on this tiny planet, to make up our minds. He will not allow the time of the end to come until we are so settled into the truth that we cannot be moved. (see Rev. 7:1-3)

11. But what about God's wrath?

God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choice. It is not like human anger.

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Venden: Someone suggested that they would appreciate it if you would review those three perspectives, three ways of looking at it. Would you mind doing that?

Maxwell: Ah, I'll try doing that again. It won't come out quite the same, but maybe we're like the four Gospels.

The first view that's widely held - I mean, even in heathenism - is that because we have disobeyed God, we have displeased Him, we have offended Him, we've even made Him angry. We have incurred His wrath. Now, is there anything that can be done to assuage God's wrath, to appease His anger, to propitiate Him? By the way, that is the meaning of that word. To propitiate is to appease.

If it's your anniversary, and your wife is going to fix a special supper, and you're going to be home early, and you're on the way home at 11:30 P.M., and it's just dawned on you it's your anniversary; and you look earnestly and are happy to find a florist open that hour of the night; and you get chocolates in the drug store, and you get everything you can; and you arrive at the door and gingerly hold all those things in, so she will see them before she sees you - that is propitiation. That's true! That's exactly the meaning of that word in any dictionary. Well, that belongs to the first view. God is angry, He is wrathful, you're in trouble; is there anything that can be done to assuage His wrath, appease His anger, so that He might find it in His heart to forgive you and not destroy you, and bless you instead? The second one. . .

Venden: Graham, excuse me just a moment. Doesn't that very word "propitiation," isn't that a word that Paul used?

Maxwell: Now, that's so crucial, and that belongs in the night on Why Jesus Had To Die. But some folk may not be. . .

Venden: . . . I can hear that popping up in people's minds out here.

Maxwell: Yes. On the evening that we'll discuss that, we will look at that word. It's a most interesting word. And it doesn't mean propitiation. And that's why some versions will have not "propitiation" but "expiation." Of course, I don't think it means that either. Sometimes you'll find "atonement" there. Or you'll find "reconciliation." There are more translations of that word than of any other similar passage in the whole Bible. And I'll put a number of them in our sheet that night, so you can see.

Actually, the word that's used, when Jesus was shown publicly dying, He became our - the word that was used in the Greek, is the Greek name for the mercy seat.

Of course, the mercy seat wasn't called a mercy seat. It was called the lid. So this gets complicated. But that night - I'd like to run you through how this goes. The thing is, that when Paul thought of the meaning of why Jesus died, he thought of the meaning of what happened in front of them at the ark, with the Law below that had been broken; and the presence of God, represented by the Shekinah above; and there was a lid in between. Actually, the word in the Hebrew just means the lid, the cover. In fact, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the Day of the Lid, the cover. That's all it is.

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But covering came to have a very special meaning. And so when the Jews were translating the Bible from Hebrew into Greek, and they had the Hebrew word for the cover, or the lid, it had come to mean so much that they didn't translate it into Greek for lid or cover. They used this word, "hilasterion", which means place or means of reconciliation. Where at-one-ment takes place, where war is changed to peace, you see; and disunity and hostility had changed to unity and love and cooperation.

So when Jesus died, He became the place or means by which at-one-ment may take place— or reconciliation. But it's interesting how that traces back to the cover of the ark. In case you don't come back, how did it get to be called "mercy seat"? Luther made it up, clear out of his head. "Gnadstool," in Old German. It had never been called that before. Well, how did it get into English? Because Tyndale was a friend of Luther's, and he brought over many things from Luther into English. And so you'll find in Tyndale's translation, "mercy seat."

But God never said to Moses, "Get enough gold, and make a mercy seat." He said, "Get some gold, and make a lid; make a cover," you see. But it became a very special cover. It had very special meaning. You know what happened before that ark, you know.

And so when Jesus died, He became really, what all that typified, didn't He? He became the means by which the war may be brought to an end and peace may be assured, and hostile ones might be brought near - and all the other meanings of "atonement" which equals at-one-ment — unity, rather than war.

That's another word, by the way. On atonement, it said that the word atonement occurs very rarely in the New Testament. That's because the Greek word is usually translated reconciliation. There's lots of atonement in there; it's just they didn't usually translate it "atonement." They preferred "reconciliation." Atonement is reconciliation; atonement is not paying a legal penalty; atonement means unity, at-one-ment. You know, that's how the word was made up "at" hyphen "one" hyphen "ment." It's the opposite of war. It's peace. It's unity. It's harmony. It's love. And if all the provisions of the Plan of Salvation do not bring us back to at-one-ment, then they fail. Doesn't that sound familiar in the great controversy, you see?

Unfortunately, "atonement" is usually limited to the second way of looking at what went wrong, you see. That what went wrong is, that we have broken the rules, we have violated God's commandments. And as a result, we are in deep and serious legal trouble. Because the law and justice require that God destroy His misbehaving children. That's the law. Or even worse, that if you have broken His Law, which says that we should love Him and love each other, God is required by law and justice to torture you in sulphurous flames for eternity.

Is there any way by which God could legally forgive us, and not destroy us, or not torture us for eternity, and yet still appear to be just in His own eyes, and in the eyes of the onlooking universe? The problem is primarily a legal one. But it's based on the understanding that if you break the rules, it is required - it is required - that you be put to death.

Ellen White suggests that that thought destroys human reason. Because it means that God has said what I suggested the husband might say to his wife: "Honey, you either love me, or I'll kill you." That sounds terrible, said that way. It's better to use long words and phrases, so it doesn't sound so bad. Even the word "destroy" doesn't sound so bad. But "Hell" sounds worst of all. Ellen White says of this idea, that no heresy has turned more millions of people against God,

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than the idea that He must eternally torture you if you do not obey Him.

But to obey Him is to love Him. What is love worth, if it's under penalty and threat of execution, even torture? It destroys it. How can you trust and love someone who terrifies you? So this has to be resolved. That's number two.

Venden: Graham, what I hear you saying with number two, is that God could be very loving - very well, maybe not the angry God in number one that you have to propitiate. But in number two, He really would like to forgive you, but He's in a bind.

Maxwell: Yes. He's faced with a legal problem.

Venden: If He forgives you, it's going to destroy His government, since it's founded on law. And law is kind of standing over here, and I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to do it.

Maxwell: That's right. He'll cry while He does it.

Venden: But He still has to.

Maxwell: That's right. If you would do that to your wife, you'd say, "Look, Honey, if you do not love me, I'll have to kill you; but I'll cry while I do it." Then say, "I love you."

Venden: Not a great improvement.

Maxwell: No. So, then number three is: I think it's good with number three to put the law right up front and say, "Yes indeed, we have violated God's law. Indeed, we have broken the rules. We have. And we know what the rules expect of us. It expects unfeigned love for God and for each other. And if we love, we're not angry. I mean, we're not impatient; we're not arrogant, is the word I wanted. We're not rude. I mean, we really treat each other well. That's what the law asks for. And we have broken the rules. We have not been loving, trusting, trustworthy people.

Now, what has led us to be like this? Because we have allowed ourselves to be deceived by Satan's lies. And because he has pictured God as arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. We have allowed ourselves to turn away from the true God, to all kinds of substitutes. Now, you think of all the substitutes just mentioned in scripture. Even Dagon the fish god, you know. And all the other things that people have worshiped through the years — even reptiles.

Now, what happens when we turn to other things? Is there anything even close to the true God, who might be second-best but not too bad? If you worship him, you'd become a pretty fine person; just slightly short. Is it either/or? We either worship the true God as He is; or if we prefer some substitute, as Hosea said, "It is a law that we will become like the object of our worship." People who worshiped beetles and crocodiles - look what it did to them. People who worshiped an arbitrary, vengeful God, became arbitrary and vengeful.

Before the Damascus road, Saul worshiped a vengeful God. And so in God's name, he could help stone heretics - saints, no less. He helped Stephen be stoned to death - in God's name. That's the kind of God he worshiped. And when his conscience was tugging, you know, he went out to stifle his conscience by engaging in a great evangelistic effort that consisted of delivering as many souls, bound hand and foot, to the penitentiary, and maybe have them killed. He did it in God's name!

It was a law, you know; we become, we behave, like the one we worship and admire. And

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because some of us have believed Satan's lies, we have been turned away from the true God to many substitutes. And if we're sincere in our worship — this is what's so cruel. The more religious you are, the more dangerous this is, the more essential it is that we have the truth about God. Because if you're really devout in your worship and have a wrong picture of God, it is a law you will become like the one you worship and admire.

And so, we have done this, and we are in trouble. Because we have turned from God - the true God - and have listened to others, we have reaped disastrous consequences in this life. And in the end, if God should leave us alone, we would die.

Is there anything that could be done to win us back to trust? I mean, could Satan's false accusations be exposed for what they are? Could his charges be met in a satisfactory way? Could questions - legitimate questions - that have been stirred up by the war; could they adequately answered? And could the truth about our God and His government be made absolutely clear, clear enough that we have no excuse for going another direction or saying that we're in the dark?

Is there any way, in other words, that we could be won back from our misunderstanding and our distrust, to love, faith and admiration for the true God? Because if we're won back to regard Him that way, and regard Him that way enough that we stand humbly in His Presence and say, "What must we do to be well? We're in a mess; what must we do to be saved?" then He can readily heal the damage done.

That's why all God asks of us is trust. But He doesn't ask us to trust Him as a stranger. There's been a war in which He has been accused. And God says, "Without evidence, how could you make up your minds." And He's paid the infinite price to give us the evidence.

So in the third view, the big difference is, it's totally preoccupied with the truth about God. In the other views, it's, how can we move God? or how can God be legally free to do things for us?

In the third one, the only way we can be won back to trust God, is to learn the truth about Him and then freely choose. The only way we can become like Him, is to know what He's like - the only way anybody else can. And so with the third view, you spend all your time talking about God. And that's what the Good News is all about.

And to the extent that our Adventist Church might espouse the third view, we would be known primarily for what we have to say about God. Is that how we're known? We have a marvelous reputation. And that means we'll have to progress from being "people helping people", where we have pictures about ourselves so we look good, to become rather people helping people come to know God, who is the only One who looks really good.

And I hope there will be another version of that Reader's Digest ad. The first one was one hundred per cent about us. And the Good News is not about us. The Good News is about God. Then we don't have to be on the defensive all the time. So we've got some bad people among us. So you're having trouble too. What's news? You know, that's the way it is.

But don't look at us. Look at God. It is our high privilege, sick as we may be, covered with boils as Job was, to bear witness to the truth about our God.

Comment: Do you see the world as being predominantly evil or good, at the present time?

Maxwell: Well, I may want to respond to that maybe in the scripture that I read: "There is nobody good; not even one. We are all sinners." But your question, you know, could have several

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philosophical backgrounds to it - that the world is inherently evil. I hope not, because this is the only one we're ever going to have. This is our world. And after the thousand years, this one is restored, and we live here. We can even love this world - don't be world - "God so loved the world."

So yes, this world is greatly damaged by the war. Even nature is damaged. Why do scrubjays come and kill the hummingbirds when they're just coming out of their eggs? Doesn't that infuriate you? One time just outside our family room window, a nest was made, and our girls were little then. They looked out - it was beautiful to watch. And here came the eggs, and then the babies. And then one of those scrubjays came; killed the lot. As far as the children were concerned, that was more important than the war up in Heaven. It was terrible!

So even nature has been disturbed - in many ways. But people - we're rather like people in God's hospital, and He loves every patient. He just wishes the patients would cooperate more and trust Him enough, not to cheat and throw away the medicine all the time, and so forth.

So, not wholly evil; but yet, which of us is really good? What was behind your question though?

Comment: As I see it, the great controversy between God and Satan is one of which we'll triumph over. Will good triumph over evil?

Maxwell: Yes.

Comment: Now, it's my belief that the great controversy is not going to be resolved until good triumphs on this world over evil, without divine intervention. By that, I mean the Second Coming. I think there's evidence for that in Revelation, when it speaks of the white rider going forth. His name shall be the Word of God, and that we shall spread the word of God through the whole world. And this is before the Second Coming, before the judgment, before Satan is chained up. And I'm wondering what's your. . .

Maxwell: Oh, I think your most interesting comment was, "without divine intervention." It would depend what you meant by "intervention."

Comment: . . .I mean without the Second Coming. I'm sure that. . .

Maxwell: It won't happen before, even though it will appear that the good are losing.

Comment: Well, no, I don't believe that.

Maxwell: Well, Revelation 13 says that when the devil is through with his final campaign, the whole world will be worshipping him, except the few whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. So, if you count numbers, we lose. But we don't count numbers; at least we shouldn't.

Comment: Revelation 19, on verse 11, talks about the rider on the white horse. And this scene is coming after the triumph of the devil everywhere.

Maxwell: Now, do you mean to say that at first it will appear the devil has won, and the whole world is worshipping him, and the remnant can then conduct a tremendous evangelistic effort, and they win the rest of the world?

Comment: That's what I . . .

Maxwell: They win everybody.

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Comment: Not everybody. I think the sharp, two-edged sword is going to be the weapon they use, and I don't think that's going to be a literal weapon. It remains to be seen. . .

Maxwell: How would they triumph then, if they only win two-thirds? They got a third of the bad. What would determine that this was the end, then? They haven't triumphed yet, in the sense you're speaking now.

Comment: I think it would have to do with good triumphing in terms of being in control of the world, let's say, as far as. . .

Maxwell: Do you see God's followers, then, finally coming into the ascendancy, and they manage the government of this planet, and everything is done beautifully; but there's a significant number still misbehaving, and hopefully they're all in the Conference penitentiaries, and so on. How would that be? Or are they still on the loose, causing trouble?

Comment: Only God can say what the answer to that question is.

Maxwell: Well, that's the interesting thing; only God can say. I read from verse 13, the end comes right after that. The whole world worships the beast, except a few.

Comment: From. . . ?

Maxwell: In 13. So I get the opposite picture, that it will appear that once again God has been defeated, as at the time of the crucifixion, you know.

Comment: Well you see, Revelation goes through twice — it goes through the whole process— as I read it—twice. As the Second Coming is mentioned twice. I think— I'm not quite sure when, whereabouts. And that's part of the. . .

Maxwell: Well, I like your thought, that maybe, you know, the good could finally triumph and be almost more successful than God was up in Heaven.

Comment: I think the sharp, two-edged sword may have something to do with the fact that unrighteous people aren't going to be able to tolerate living in a righteous world.

Maxwell: What will they do?

Comment: It'll drive them crazy.

Maxwell: Maybe rocketry will be at the stage that they could move elsewhere by then, perhaps. Or maybe we'd ship them off in this new vehicle. I mean, wouldn't the moon be a suitable place for such like that, maybe?

Venden: That was a very probing question, and very interesting.

Maxwell: Yes, good question.

Comment: My question was, going back to the children of Israel and the Commandments. When they were to nail them on the wall and teach these to their children; now, would that have been under love, or would that have been under forcification type of thing?

Maxwell: Well, I like it. You're a quarter from the shimar there, which is so beautiful. And I should

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get out my phylacteries out and put them on before I recite this. You remember in Deuteronomy, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." And "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart." Remember how beautiful that is? Those are the favorite words to put in those little leather [referring to the phylacteries]; one on the forehead, and one on the wrist, and one on the doorpost.

Jesus said that some of the hypocrites made their phylacteries extra large. Then you really knew a Bible believer, you see, by the size of his phylactery. We haven't thought of that yet around here. Always study the lesson seven times; get to wear a bigger phylactery, I guess.

But the beauty of that shimar [sp?] is tremendous, because it says, "These words about loving God shall be in your heart, and you shall teach them to your children." And that's the only real place to keep those words. They nailed them to the wall; or, God gave them to them on the tables of stone, because they weren't in their heart.

And of course, the heart is the mind; you know that. We think of the heart nowadays as where you love; the mind as where you do your cool thinking. No, in the Bible, move it all down like this. You do your feelings down here in the bowels, the splanchna, and you do your thinking up here. So when it says, "I love the Lord with all my heart," you mean, "I love Him with my very best thoughts." And that really means something.

To have the Ten Commandments on the wall, means we're passing through an emergency where people don't have it in their hearts, so you have to put it up there. But think what the law says when it's on the wall: "My children, I want all the murdering to stop, Please. And I want all the adultery to stop, and all the stealing to stop." How embarrassing for our God to have to say that to His children. The Ten Commandments are in emergency form; they really are. But God graciously added what we needed.

But ultimately as in, you remember, Jeremiah 31, it says, "Some day when we have good shepherds, good pastors, they will help us get this law off the wall and into our hearts" - where a man does his thinking and his feeling. And then we'll do what's right, not because it says so on the wall, but because we want to do what's right, we agree. We offer then God intelligent obedience. And then, He doesn't have to tell us anymore.

It must embarrass Him every time He says, "Children, please stop the murdering." Imagine at home at breakfast, asking your children, "Let's make this a good day. Billy, will you promise not to murder anybody on the playground today? If Johnny pushes you on the way up the slide, don't kill him this time, please."

And he says, "All right, Daddy, I'll try to make it a good day."

Then you turn to your daughter and say and say, "Don't steal today. That was terrible yesterday. I want it to stop."

"O.K. Daddy, if you say so."

"And wife, you most of all, when I'm gone, please no adultery with the milkman."

She says, "Well, if you say so."

He says, "I mean it. If I come home and find you've done it, I'll kill you."

Now, we have a happy home of freedom, love — ah! That's a serious emergency when you

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have to talk like that. And God is far more loving than we are. He must have hated every time he had to say it. But rather than leave us alone in our emergency, He talked like this. He even sent she-bears one time and opened up the earth another. God has run terrible risks to keep in touch with us children; and bring us to the place where He'll never have to talk like that to us again.

Comment: . . . on this angry, vengeful God, and so forth. And Christ came to this earth to show us the Father, show what God is like. And I like the illustration. Sometimes even when we read what Christ said, we get the feeling that He would speak something like what we would do. And even when He spoke, He had something about His voice, something about His attitude, something about His demeanor around Him, that inspired somebody to respond; like the paralytic at the pool. He came over very quietly, spoke to him earnestly. The man was inspired. The very voice of Christ's inspired.

Now, would you like to sort-of go about this and explore this through the "vengeful" part?

Maxwell: Yes, I think this is very significant. In fact, so much so, that I want to talk about it more the night on, The Question of Authority. Many places in the Bible, you know, God thunders; and the people then recognize His authority. If He thunders loudly enough, and the fire comes down, and the lightning and the earthquake, and so forth, then He has great authority with them - until it all dies down, and then the reverence is gone.

When Jesus was here, He never used that method. And so He did not seem to exercise much authority with many. But with some He did. And the Bible says, "He spoke with great authority." Some people did not need to be thundered to. But the way He touched people, as you mentioned. And the look on His face; and the sound of His voice - which was like music. Along with the beauty and the truthfulness of the words that He spoke.

And they never were difficult words. The simplest could understand. To some people - to humble people, who were willing to listen - He spoke with great authority. So whether or not God speaks to us with His authority, depends upon the kind of people we are. To some of us, the still, small Voice is overwhelming. We don't need thunder and lightning.

But about the other, you see - If I'm hard of hearing, God won't say, "Look, I only talk softly around here; if you can't hear Me, that's tough!" No, if we're stubbornly unwilling to listen, the ground may shake beneath our feet, you know. She-bears may look through the window, and the mountains begin to smoke. And that's the way God will do it.

And now you say, "Is that You, God?"

"Yes, and I never want to do this again. Be quiet; like `Be still and know that I am God.'" He doesn't like doing that.

And that's what Elijah learned, you know. When the fire was coming down on Mount Carmel, he was in high spirits. Tremendous. Even the stones were consumed, and the water was lapped up, and the priests of Baal were scared. And Elijah was standing there thrilled with a mighty manifestation of God's power. And then when it all went out, he was immensely depressed. And he ran away forty days and forty nights, and hid in a cave.

And then he thought, "Surely God will come and speak to me. He has before." And then comes the wind. And he thinks, "Here He comes!" And then the earthquake; and then the fire. And the message came, "God is not in any one of those." And Elijah said, "Something new is happening today."

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And then came what the Hebrew calls "the sound of a small silence." The versions have difficulty translating this, but they all suggest it was very, very quiet. And Elijah went out and bowed his head and said, "Here I am."

And God said, "Elijah, what on earth are you doing here?" You don't shout that to a person. He quietly said, "What are you doing here?" And they had a conversation at the mouth of the cave about God, and about Elijah.

And God went on record there, "I'd rather always talk to you this way." And that's why we've run the risk, I suppose— calculated risk, of having our series this way - sitting down, making it conversational. There's been lots of thunder through the years. And I'm not minimizing thunder. God thunders; has often thundered. But this time, we'd like to do it without wind, earthquake and fire, and just do it with the still, small voice of truth.

And we'll find out - assuming that we do a halfway decent job - how many people in this area are ready to submit to the ultimate authority of the truth, spoken softly and sincerely in love. And if there are lots of us, it will be a terrifically good feeling.

Comment: But even in the thunder and the lightning, there's love.

Maxwell: Ah, or He wouldn't have thundered!

Comment: That's right.

Maxwell: Because every time He thundered, the devil would say, "Look at Him bellowing again. I told you He was an arbitrary, vengeful God." I mean, God ran a terrible risk every time He raised His voice. But now we understand why He raised His voice. And if we are still scared, we owe God an apology.

Venden: When we were talking this morning, Graham - you've made the statement that God will do whatever is needed to get us to take Him seriously. I like the way you put that.

Maxwell: Yes. I'm glad He's willing to do that.

Comment: I like the idea of— you have a relationship with God. And from each stage, from the point of getting acquainted, to the point of having full relationship with Him, He has accounted you righteous each step.

Maxwell: Yes. Now that depends on whether you're on One, Two or Three of those three choices that I made. If you're primarily in legal trouble, then at each step somehow He has some kind of legal arrangement by which He can still count you legally okay.

But in the third view, God says — to the prodigal son, who is suffering from malnutrition, and maybe all kinds of diseases; who knows what — "You're my son. And you're coming home. And I'll treat you as if you'd never left."

And so He treats the one who has taken the first step toward home that way; and all is well. Even though we need a lot of healing, you know. It would depend whether you meant that legally, He regards us as righteous, or He just treats us as if we were, because we're His children! There's no fake in this, no legal gimmickry in this thing. He actually treats us as if we had always been His loyal children.

Comment: I was considering the third [step], but in this aspect of, from

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acquaintance, to friendship, to partnership and on through to full marriage and . . .

Maxwell: You did that nicely; I think it's good.

Comment: . . . and working through life.

Maxwell: You could even have a moment of infatuation at the beginning, which [unintelligible].

Comment: If I've found out that something in my life was wrong, then I quickly find out from Him how to take care of it, not on the basis of that He has punished me before in my past for doing it.

Maxwell: Oh, I think you could capitalize on that illustration very, very well. And fortunately, God doesn't tell us everything that's wrong with us when we first come. It's like you come to a physician, and he starts telling you everything he's found wrong - I mean, this could overwhelm you. And the patient might die before he's had a chance to do anything. So you start with the most important things first, perhaps.

I like the thought that God will gradually, in His own way, reveal to us our shortcomings. I think Moses was simply stunned when he found he had all that irritation in him at the rock, and that he let God down that way. I think he repented before the rock was ever hit by the rod. "God, what am I doing? I'm sorry." But it was in there. So I see God leading us along and we find these shortcomings, but then He has the remedy — just the way He put it.

Comment: . . . sometimes gradually showing us His love. Some of us need to be shown a lot of it all at once, but some of us gradually.

Maxwell: I don't think God can even tell us how free we are right off, you know; I don't think so. We wouldn't handled aright. No, when we start out, He puts us in the playpen. Because if He turned us loose, we'd go out and play football on the street. Right in the middle of Highway 10 out there. And soon we'd be dead.

So God does not tell us how free He eventually wants us to be; lest by irresponsibly using our freedom, we lose it entirely. So it is very much growing all the way along. Ah, that really fits the picture in Scripture - from rebirth to maturity. Definitely.

Comment: Could you enlarge a bit on the difference between the first coming judgment upon sin and the second coming judgment upon sin — the fact that we still see sin around us speaks pretty loudly, that He couldn't introduce the Kingdom at the first coming. Or if He could and didn't, that would raise the question about His character.

So part of the bad news of the first coming, was the defaulting of ancient Israel, and the unfulfillment of a big portion of the Old Testament, which carries on into the book of Revelation, and makes a final judgment at the Second Coming, issues that were not settled at the first one. Could you enlarge on that?

Maxwell: Could you name an issue not settled at the first coming?

Comment: The Kingdom isn't with us right now.

Maxwell: And yet, when He was here he said that the Kingdom is among you . . . it's within you.

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Comment: Yes; the people defaulted. A big portion of the Old Testament they were promised the universal Kingdom, they were promised peace to dwell in the land forever. And then He says, "the kingdom shall be taken from you and given to another nation," which is spiritual Israel.

Another issue that wasn't settled, was in the Old Testament, you have Babylon defeated by Medo-Persia, defeated by Greece, and so forth. So God over-rules in power; He'll use one pagan nation to defeat another pagan nation. But Babylon still isn't defeated. It exists in the book Revelation to be defeated again - this time by spiritual Israel, because spiritual Israel didn't develop in the Old Testament, to defeat spiritual Babylon.

So I think today that we still have not got to the core issues of the theology of the final battle of spiritual Babylon vs. spiritual Israel, and how this battle settles certain issues that haven't been settled yet.

Maxwell: Yeah, you're approaching this in a certain way, a certain way of seeing events and sequence, and so forth. I think one could cut one's self loose from those many, many problems as they're represent — they're sometimes in highly symbolic form — and kind of take a little perspective from a little distance, here.

It says, God sent His Son to deal with sin. And He condemned sin in the flesh. Now, in the legal model, this has a certain understanding. In what I would call the real model - where we live, people, this universe is inhabited with people. A real God, real angels, real people, many of us in trouble — why would sin need to be condemned? Not for some legal reason. We need to understand how devastating are the consequences of sin. Not the penalty imposed, but the consequences. And the universe saw this; and they'll never need to see it again.

Christ came and lived among us as an infinitely gracious Person. He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He was so-o-o patient and respectful toward the worst of sinners. And they hated Him.

Now, who hated Him? Not the heathen; but the most devout group of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-quoting Adventists the world has ever seen. What they were doing, is the greatest of all evils. But it was the result of obeying God for the wrong reason.

And this is what Satan prefers to do. Not make us irreligious. Not make us atheists. The best thing he can do, is to turn us into people who will obey the whole blueprint for the wrong reason - because we have accepted his picture of God. If behind all God's laws and all these things He wants us to do, we see a God who has the Sovereign right, indeed, to be arbitrary — I read it the other day in an important document: God has infinite authority. He can tell you anything He wants you to do, and he can do anything about it if you don't obey Him. Does that sound arbitrary? You cannot say that of God, because He has a right to do whatever He wants to do. That's a very popular view. I tell you, it ruins your relationship with God and can make you cruel.

There were Reformers who held that view, and attended to the execution of Christian "heretics" in the days of the Reformation. It's happened all through the years. The most cruel persecutions in the history of mankind, have been perpetrated in the name of religion, in the name of God.

So Jesus came to the only people on this planet who really believed the Bible: Creation Week - sure, they believed; the Ten Commandments — You name it; the whole list of rules of cleanliness. They even strained out gnats from their goats' milk, lest they violate those rules. And they tithed little things like mint, anise and cumin, you know. "Nine for me, and one for the Lord" - they went through it.

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And they were so open about their study of the Bible, they wore selected passages, you know, in these little boxes. Could you do that, and walk around San Bernardino? You know. They weren't ashamed. "We are God's people."

And all Heaven watched as God assumed human form, and came to live on this planet. And He didn't go to - well, name all the other places He might have gone to. He came home. It says in John, "He came to His home, and His family rejected Him."

Now, He was saying something about evil. The most evil thing is not to do the things we usually regard as evil. But the most evil thing is to claim to know God, even be pretentiously pious; and in your heart you are a fraud. And because you do the right things for the wrong reason, your own heart is being turned against God. It becomes cruel. And they could even say to the Son of God, to His face, "You have a devil. Your picture of God is Satanic and false." And they tortured Him to death! And having nailed Him to the cross, they ran home to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy. With nothing forbidden in their stomachs, and their tithe fully paid up.

And as Jesus died, He said, "This is what it's cost. Universe, can you see why I don't want you to serve Me and My Father and the Holy Spirit from fear? If you don't know the truth about Us, your very efforts to obey, will make you cruel like this."

That's the sort of thing that was revealed. It was no legal arrangement there. This was real history. It was Jesus going through this awful experience to say to the stunned universe, "No wonder God has told us He does not want us to serve Him from fear."

Now, what causes you to serve God from fear? He says, "You either love Me and obey Me, or I'll kill you. And I'll kill you as slowly and painfully as I know how. Now, I'm a good God; I'll cry as you die." And that blows the mind. It simply does not make sense.

And you say, "Well, for anybody else, that would be arbitrary, and that would be exacting, and that would be vengeful, and that would be unforgiving, and that would be severe. But you can't say that about God. Because being God, He has perfect right to do whatever He wants."

And what you're saying is, God will never, ever make sense to you. And if He doesn't, you better not believe Him. It wouldn't be safe. You might wind up in Guiana, full of cyanide. That's what nine hundred people did, who believed a man who said, "I don't expect this to make sense to you; but I am God, and I expect you to believe it." They died! They gave their lives because of their faith in that evil man.

God does not ask us to believe Him without evidence. Look what it's cost to clear things up. So I would rather think in those terms, and one can discuss the whole history of it, without, you know, getting into too close a series of events. But they're all in there. So we've got to look at them. That's true.

By the way, the question is raised - that's not the end of it; He is waiting for something. There's no question about it, or He would have come. He must hate to wait any longer. So I think we should pursue what you said someday, and consider what He's waiting for.

Comment: Boy, this is something else - I kind of wish I was an angel with even little wings, running around the Milky Way somewhere, right now. But the question. . .

Maxwell: Quite so, that's interesting; I like that.

Comment: This big problem is heavy, you know. All the problems that it caused. It's really

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confusing at times, and with all the different views.

Maxwell: What I like about what you suggested is, if we could get out that far, and from that perspective, and listen to our struggling to understand in the things we say, I often wonder how often we may make Heaven wince by what we say. And then I wonder on the other hand, if sometimes they might even be pleased. That would be nice.

Comment: In Philippians it talks about how it says that, God, who "works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure." I've heard said that, you know, you get so much filled with the Holy Spirit until He takes you over, and you start doing good and stuff like that.

Then on the other hand, I hear that, you know, you have to do good. You have to— once you know the Lord you have to work hard at it. Otherwise, you know, you start slipping, and stuff like that. And so, what is that mess [?], and how does it work? He says, "Read the Bible." Well, how does that work? What do you do after you get it?

Maxwell: Now, this is a very worthy topic. We have an evening on God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done, when we should talk about that. But who knows whether we'll see each other again? It impresses me that the more one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the more one would have the fruits of the Spirit. So we start down the list: love, and joy, and peace; and we come finally to temperance. And so if you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you will abstain from liquor, tobacco, narcotics, and you will have moderation in all other things.

No, that is not the word there. The fruit of the Spirit - the last one - is pronounced "enkratia" - which means self-discipline, self-mastery, self-control. And the beauty of it is, if you get filled with the wrong kind of spirit from Ye Olde Spirite Shoppe, and get it out of a bottle - or a goatskin as the ancients used to - when you're filled with the wrong spirit, what happens to your self control? It's gone.

Have you ever attended a religious service where people claimed to be filled with the Spirit, and there's no self control? Just the opposite. Then that's not the Spirit of God. When the Spirit of God fills us, we have recovered the dignity of self discipline, self mastery, self control.

Now what I like is, when finally we do things God's way, and He's in charge; and we say, "We'll do anything You want us to do," He says, "What I want you to do, is to recover self control. Because I created you with individuality, power to think and to do. I don't want you just reflecting My thoughts. I don't want you just responding to the push of a button. When you say you love Me, I want it to be because you thought it through and it's **your** idea."

Or else God will not win the war. If God so controls us, that when the time of voting in the war finally comes, we are all controlled and vote for Him; then I would say God has won the great controversy by stuffing the ballot box. All the votes have been votes for Himself. We had nothing to do with it.

So this "controlled of the Spirit" needs to be phrased very carefully. If God will run us like that, why didn't He run us like this in the beginning? And then we'd never have made a mess. God wants peace and security in His universe, without running us like that. He will not take over and control. He will teach us how to recover self control.

Now, that's terrific. That's where we're most like God. You remember that marvelous sentence, "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator - individuality, power to think and to do." And it's the whole purpose of the plan of salvation to restore this power; to train people to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other

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men's thoughts - not even of God's.

If we're merely reflectors, He could have created mirrors way back. That's no problem. He wants people who respond, knowing they don't have to; who say, "We love and trust Him because we've thought it over. The evidence is there."

I think we have sometimes overdone this and suggested, "I would rather give up all my freedom. I want to give up the image of God. Just take over, God, and run me." And God will say, "When I think of the price I've paid to keep you free, and you want to hand it back - now, that's real ingratitude."

So one needs to phrase that very carefully, "coming under the control of God."

Venden: Your question also went on. . .

Maxwell: How to do it.

Venden: Yeah, and you're moving there.

Maxwell: Yes, that would be the beauty. Because if you listen to the Holy Spirit - you want to listen to the Spirit - you get the message back, you don't expect little voices, you know, and calls on the telephone.

"I've already done a lot of work. I've inspired some of your fellow believers to write a large Book. You say you're too busy to read that? You'd rather have a phone call?" Now, that's a little impudent, isn't it?

God says, "If you don't have time to read the Book, then probably we can't do much together." If you have access to the Book, and it's in a translation you can read - look what we have in this land - we have no excuse for not reading. The Spirit inspired that record. And I would say, the Spirit speaks to us through that Book. That's why we have a whole section on The Record of the Evidence, How to Evaluate the Evidence, and so on.

So I would say, that if we allow the Spirit to instruct us and make us such people, and help us recover the dignity of self control by communing with God through the study of the scriptures - because as I read the scriptures, I learn what God is like, and I like what I see. And I say, "I could trust You. Tell me more." And I learn more about freedom. And I learn more about self control. And I learn how much it means to God, that I prize my freedom, and tell Him that I love Him, and it be really me talking. And that that's the way He wants to hear it.

He doesn't want to over influence me or overwhelm me. That He even says, "I'm sorry I ever had to raise my voice and send she-bears. I'd like you to do what's right because you are really convinced it's right." Now that's self control.

So this is the most prized thing He offers to us. And many religions say, "God, please take it back; please take it back." I'll never forget one lady who came up and said, "I'm inspired by the freedom, but I kind of wish I weren't that free. Couldn't I give Him back a little? And then He could take over, and I'd have it made. I'm willing to give back a lot of freedom to make it to the Kingdom."

That's quite an interesting thing to say, when God gave His life to preserve our freedom.

Venden: All right, Keith has been waiting for a while.

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Maxwell: Oh, yes, Keith.

Comment: I was going to say one thing but you all switched me to another. I was thinking about in Genesis 4:7, right now 5,6 and 7 [several unintelligible words] where he talks about Cain and his wrath [?] came in and his countenance has fallen. But that's not the point. I asked you before about you giving me [unclear] the water as the bucket brigade and putting out the fires. The rabbi gave me a question about - Who killed the children of Egypt? He says, his God doesn't kill babies.

Maxwell: His doesn't?

Comment: He doesn't.

Maxwell: Oh. You know, today we only touched on the result of going our own rebellious way—has disastrous consequences in this life; and if God were to leave us alone, we would die. But we really haven't dealt with this matter of death. It is, though, a very important matter around the circle. Because there are various and sundry explanations being given. And some put God in a good light, and some do not.

Some saints are so eager to put God in a good light, that they suggest God has never ever, and never will, taken anyone's life. Then you have great difficulty with all kinds of stories in the Bible. And there are various suggestions offered, as to how these people did die, like the firstborn of Egypt - how did they die? And one explanation is, that whenever God removes His protection, the devil cannot resist the impulse to kill. And so God has had to count on this through the years. Because when it came — [laughter] maybe I don't need to say any more; you see the point. Especially with the tenth plague, when Moses went before Pharaoh and said, "God says, if you will not let the people go, the firstborn will die."

Now, the previous nine plagues had shown that the God of Israel was more powerful than the god of the Egyptians. That's what all those plagues were for. They weren't arbitrary and vengeful. Every one of those plagues demonstrated the impotence of the Egyptian deities, you know. How could you worship a frog when you're stomping on them all day and sweeping them up into stinking piles in the evening; and then kneeling down and saying, lord god frog, bless mommy, bless daddy; help me to be like you. You know, it wouldn't make sense.

Now, there's a lot of that in the Bible, that we could parallel with it. The tenth plague - the firstborn would be the special care of the deities.

And so God says, "If you will not let My people go, the firstborn will die." And then He turned to Satan and said, "Satan, I'm really counting on you this time. Because if you don't come through, I'm going to look like a God who can't predict and can't pull it off."

And the devil finally came to his senses and said, "This time, God, I'm not going to help You. I'm not going to kill those firstborn. You are going to look bad." You see, this also blows the mind. It doesn't make sense at all.

So another explanation is that a natural plague fell, that only affected firstborn, a kind of like a firstborn syndrome or something — I don't know what to call it. I'm an amateur in this.

Well, on the one hand, I honor the attempt to put God in a good light. But I think that to put God in a good light, should not require that we do very devious and strange things with the scriptures. There is another much easier way, I believe; and that's to distinguish between the

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first death and the second death. Jesus said, "That first death is just sleep. Remember with Lazarus? He's fallen asleep, and I go to awaken him." He was really dead.

I would be very willing to let God put millions of His children sleep. And He promises to awaken every one of them in the appropriate resurrection. So I would say an angel of God came and put those boys to sleep. They certainly didn't die because they were bad; they died because they were the firstborn, and we may meet some of them in the resurrection of the righteous. Some very good boys may have died.

We don't even know about the Flood. There may have been a little girl who said, "Daddy, please take me to the boat; please take me to the boat." And he didn't, and she died in the Flood; and we meet her in the resurrection of the just. We have no right to say they were all bad there.

How about the ones who were in the boat? Were they in the boat because they were good? Look at their record. Look what they did. No, God saved those eight because they got in the boat. That's all. They got in the boat. The saints He saves in the end had better be better than that, you know. I mean, even Noah hadn't taken the temperance pledge, you recall. Lots of problems followed thereafter.

So I would rather leave it up to God, to interrupt the lives of His children on this planet. What He wants us to know, is our eternal life - He's not the one to take it away. Especially since we die in fiery flames.

You see, if — take the most general view of Hell - I mean, does God torture His children? If He's the One who brings the fire in the end, and we die slowly in agony in the fire, God's a torturer and I'm scared. He even resurrects the Sodomites, who have already burned once. Evidently they didn't hurt enough; so He's going to burn them again.

If God is the one who does it, we worship a torturing God. But the Bible is very clear: Fire comes down from God out of Heaven and consumes them. We better study what that fire is. The Bible talks about it a great deal.

But God's involvement is His wrath. He "pours out His wrath without mixture." Then I'd better learn about His wrath. I'd better read Romans 1, and Hosea 11, and dozens of other places.

But the best place to know how God is involved the death of the wicked, is to watch His Son die. Or do you believe Jesus died as a sinner dies? That's the meaning of, if you want to take a legal model, taking our sins and putting them on Him. In other words, He died the death of the sinner, though He was perfect, to be sure.

Then if you want to know how the wicked will die, go to the cross and watch Him die. Did the Father torture Him to death? He gave Him up as He will give up the wicked in the end. And then these awful, natural consequences will take place, of which we've been so mercifully spared, you know. Normally, we should not all be alive. But for the grace of God and His long-range plan, we would never have been born. Adam and Eve would have been consumed in the beginning.

But because God wants to say something about Himself, and because He loves us and doesn't want us to die, He has granted us time, after time, after time, that some of us might learn the truth, and some of us be won back to trust Him. He'll save and heal some off this planet. The rest He'll sadly give up. And I take literally Peter, and Revelation — they die, and the fire is so hot, the elements melt with fervent heat. And the earth needs to be recreated.

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And God says, "I'm not doing that." Because if He's doing that, let's go back and revise everything. God's message is: "All I ask of you is love. And I want freedom in My home. I want no fear. Perfect love casts out fear. Right?" All those lovely verses. And so we say as children, "That's beautiful, that's beautiful; but do we have to do it?"

And God says, "I'm sorry you asked that. I suppose I'd better tell you the other side of all this. If you don't prize freedom, if you don't behave, and if you don't love Me and love each other; I'll kill you."

And you say, "How will You kill us?"

"Well, don't think I'm going to hang you, or gas you, or have you beheaded or shot. That would be too good for you. Anybody who doesn't love Me, gets tortured to death in the fire."

You say, "Well, now You've made it clear. We feel wonderfully free as we go to bed tonight; no reason to be afraid."

But that's not leaving out those parts of scripture. The thing is, you've got to build your model on everything in the Bible. You see, the Bible that talks about His wrath as giving us up to consequence, also has the picture of the fire. And I've got to put it together. If I go to bed tonight thinking, my model is built on about seventy-one percent of the Bible, and I don't know what to do with the other twenty-nine, I'm ill at ease. I've got to be able to say honestly, "I look at all sixty-six. Many things said there; and if I have a passage I can't fit in, there's something wrong with my model, or I'm misreading the passage." So I keep working on it. And that's why I like to go through four or five times a year with other people.

Venden: All right, Graham, I think we better call . . .

Maxwell: The fire is getting warm back here - beginning to wonder.

Venden: Why don't we bow our heads just before we leave and ask Dr. Maxwell to lead us in a word of benediction.

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven, What a pleasure to be among friends where we can freely talk about Thee. And Thou art so infinite, and so far above us in one way, that we all see Thee slightly different from each other; and yet we're all looking toward the same God. And we all see enough, to feel safe with Thee, and even look forward to living with Thee for eternity.

But surely, if Thou wert the kind of person Thine enemies have made Thee out to be, it would be best if Thou didst never come. It would be no pleasure to live with such a god. And we think of what a price Thou hast paid to make these things clear. Even coming like one of us, getting hungry and tired. And not taking advantage of Thy majesty and power, but acting so humbly that even religious people despised Thee and made fun of Thy message, as even being "satanic".

What a price Thou hast paid. What humility. What willingness to run risks in our behalf. And so many of us here look at this and say, "We like what we see. We admire our God. We feel safe with Him." And we would like it if Thou shouldst come. We'd even like it if Jesus would come soon. But we know terrible events are described in scripture as happening between now and then. Most of all, that the adversary will be given freedom to deceive us as he deceived the brilliant angels. Are we ready for this? We thank Thee for waiting.

May our Friday evenings together help us to see Thee that much more clearly, that perhaps Thou couldst release those "four winds" in the book of Revelation, and let these closing events

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occur. Because though we cannot hear it now, Thou art able to say to the onlooking universe, "These friends of Mine down there, I can trust them; they will not let Me down."

We love those words about Job. We look forward to them being said about us. Forbid that any of us should miss this, we pray.

In Jesus Name,

AMEN