

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER THREE

ALL GOD ASKS IS TRUST

by A. Graham Maxwell Copyright 1984

Number Three: "**All God Asks Is Trust**" - another look at the meaning and necessity of faith, in the larger setting of the Great Controversy over God's character and government.

There has been a breakdown of trust in God's universe - even to the point of war up in heaven and continuing misunderstanding and distrust on this planet. There can be no real and lasting peace in God's family until mutual trust and trustworthiness have been restored. No wonder all God asks is trust - even of us damaged sinners. For if only we trusted Him enough to listen, He could readily heal all the damage done. God can and will save all who trust Him.

This is the third of our studies called *Conversations About God*--another look at our heavenly Father in the light of the universe-wide controversy over His character and government. In our last study we considered what it was that went wrong in God's family -- in His universe. If we can understand what it was that went wrong it will be easier for us to understand what needs to be set right and what it might take to keep things right for eternity. Then, in light of all this, if we can understand to what extent we are involved in what went wrong, it will be easier for us to understand what we must do, if anything, to be set right and live in harmony with God's universe once again.

As we said last time, it is quite clear in scripture that what went wrong was a breakdown in trust. So much so, that war broke out in heaven (Rev. 12:7) Here on this earth there is continuing mistrust and misunderstanding of our heavenly Father. We have allowed ourselves to be deceived by the adversary to the point where many, even of those who claim to worship God, worship a false picture of God (with all the hazards that result) because, as the scripture says, we tend to become like the "god" that we worship.

The only way to have lasting peace is for trust and trustworthiness to be restored. That brings us to our topic for this conversation -- "**All God Asks of Us Is Trust**". Now that includes both the loyal and the disloyal members of God's family. All God asks, even of the loyal angels, is trust. All God asks of us damaged sinners is trust, because where there is mutual trust and trustworthiness there is perfect peace, freedom and security. Then all is right, and all is well. If we only trusted God enough to be willing to listen and to stand humbly in His presence and to ask: "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be well?" -- we know that God, as Creator, could easily heal all the damage done. There is no substitute for this trust. Nothing else is as important as this trust.

All the generous and gracious provisions of the plan of salvation are of no value whatsoever if we don't trust God enough to let Him do for us what He is so eager to do. This helps to explain what we read in Acts 16:31 where Paul is speaking to the Philippian jailer in the midst of the rubble that followed the earthquake. The frightened jailer ran in and fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "What must I do to be saved?" At that point he was probably thinking, "What must I do to be safe?" Did Paul answer, "If you have time, we have twenty Bible lessons for you to study the doctrines of the church." No. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." But, you might ask, "Doesn't one also have to have faith?"

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One common explanation of the difference between belief and faith is the story of the man who strung a cable thousands of feet across the great chasm of Niagara Falls in North America. Then he got up and walked on the cable pushing a wheelbarrow across from one side to the other and back again. When he returned to his starting point he turned to the crowd of people watching and asked, "Do you believe that I can make it across again?" One of those watching answered, "Yes, I believe that you can do it." Immediately the man responded by saying, "Then climb into my wheelbarrow while I push you across." "Oh no!" said the spectator. "You see," the preacher then concludes, "he believed, but he didn't have faith." I would say that the man could walk across that cable many times every day for years without falling and I would still not climb into that wheelbarrow. Faith is not foolish and it doesn't ask us to do things that might be a hazard to our lives.

In the Bible there is no difference between belief and faith. In fact, there is only one Greek word for belief and faith. That word is **pistis**. Remember that the conversation between Paul and the jailer was in Greek. This is what has led to the different ways in which this verse has been translated. Thus we read in the KJV "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The NEB has, "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. . ." The Berkeley version has, "Have faith in Jesus . . ."

As Christians we talk about faith a great deal. But what do we mean when we say, "Have faith", "You should have more faith", "We are saved by faith", or even "righteousness by faith"? Faith is used in so many ways these days that we almost need another word. Even professional boxers sometimes knock their opponents unconscious and then, when asked what was the reason for their success they answer, "my faith".

Perhaps the most notorious definition of all was given by a small school boy who said, "Faith is believin' what you know ain't so!" You see, if you are prepared to believe what you know isn't true, that is real faith! We wouldn't go that far, but would we say that faith is believing something for which you have insufficient evidence? Because if you had sufficient evidence, you wouldn't say, "I accept that by faith", you would say, "I know". Does that mean that the more we come to know God the less faith we'll have? Will we stand in God's presence some day and say "Now that I see You, God, that's the end of my faith?" Remember that the word for faith can also mean trust, so in effect that would mean, "Now that I see you God, I don't have to trust You any more because now I know You!"

Or does that famous text in Heb. 11:1 help us? "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (KJV) Does it help us to know that faith is a "substance" or that it is "evidence". That might even suggest that having faith in something makes it so. Does that mean that if you have "faith" that there is a man on the moon, it makes it so? Or if you had faith that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was in heaven interceding with Jesus, does that make it so? Do we sometimes use faith this way? Does Heb. 11:1 encourage us to do so? Let's look at these two words. The word "evidence" is translated from the Greek word **elengkos** which is the word used for the work of the Holy Spirit. It means "to convince" or "conviction". Then the other word "substance". The Greek word is **hupostasis**. It means literally "that which stands under".

Not until the beginning of this century did archaeologists and scholars understand the meaning of this word. As they were digging up many ancient manuscripts, they even found crocodiles and cats stuffed full of written documents. Many of these documents were records of business transactions, of properties being bought and sold, and the name for these documents, which served as title deeds was **hupostasis**. Eventually they recognized that, what the Apostle was saying was that faith is a covenant, an agreement, or a business deal between us and God. You see, God has many things to offer us. But first we must come to trust Him. So He presents Himself.

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Do we find Him worthy of our trust? If so, He has many things He would like to do for us and with us. He would like to have an agreement or understanding with us. That day by day working relationship between us and God is called "faith".

So in the different translations we find this verse translated "Faith is the title deed. . . ." (Montgomery) or "Faith means we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see." (Moffatt) or "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (NIV) It helps a great deal to look at the verse just preceding this verse (remembering that in the original there were no verse or chapter divisions) see Heb. 10:35-39

If we look into the background of these verses, we will find that they come from Habakkuk chapters 1 and 2. Things seemed so bad in Habakkuk's time that when God came to him, Habakkuk said, "Why aren't you doing anything?" And God answers, "I am, but you wouldn't believe it if I told you." Habakkuk said, "Okay, I will wait patiently to see what You are going to do". And God said, "If the promise seems slow, wait for it. My righteous one will live in trust." Which is the famous verse (Rom. 1:17) that Luther used, "the just shall live by faith." It is not discussing forgiveness or justification. The background for that verse is, the one who is right with Me and is My friend will trust Me and be willing to wait. That is the kind of trust and right relationship with God that really counts.

This is the kind of trust that the loyal angels had in heaven from the time when Satan first raised the questions in the great controversy until those questions were finally answered at Calvary. Those same angels even heard God promise Adam and Eve that He would do something, and yet they waited.

It certainly makes it easier to understand salvation by faith and righteousness by faith when we understand it in this light. We are not saved by faith. That is, faith does not save us -- God saves us. But God can only save those who trust Him. Like a doctor, God is ready to heal all of the damage that sin has done to us. But He cannot force us to receive the treatment or be well. If we do not trust Him enough to listen and to cooperate and let Him heal the damage that sin has done to us, there is no way that He can help us. Doctors cannot heal rebellious patients that stay away from them because they don't trust their treatments. Only where there is mutual trust can healing really take place.

But doesn't this seem like too small a thing for God to ask for -- only trust? Isn't it also necessary to know Him, and to love Him and to obey Him, without mentioning the need for repentance, the need to be reborn, to be converted, to be justified, to be sanctified, and to be perfect etc. etc.? This list discourages many people - even those who want to have a right relationship with God. But don't be discouraged by that list. When we understand it in the light of what went wrong in God's family, every one of those items that we have mentioned is only a small part of a single, wonderful, transforming experience that is made available to us all. It was never intended to be complicated, or to be divided into so many different parts.

As an example, take the expression "to know God". What is the difference between really knowing God and really trusting Him? cf. John 17:3 As we discussed last time, to really know someone in the Biblical sense is to love him, trust him, admire him, and be his friend. This word "to know" is even used for the intimate way in which a husband and a wife know each other. In the same way, God is asking us to really know Him, to love Him, to trust Him, and admire Him as a Friend.

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In effect, God is saying, If only my children would trust Me, if they would only really love Me, if they were only willing to listen and let Me help them, if only they would turn around and come back to Me, and even choose to stay with Me forever, I could perfectly heal all the damage done. Everything would be right again and we could keep it right forever. Using simple language this is the whole list of things that God requires of us.

Often in the Bible God says, "How I wish that my children would be My friends, and that they could understand that I am their Friend -- then all would be well. Can you think of anything that would be left out if we would once again become God's loving, trusting friends? Is there anything that is necessary that God couldn't do for us?"

The Bible describes one such friend of God; and what an honor it was to be so described! Moses is so described in Exodus 33:11,17, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. . . And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'" (NIV)

Can you see how being a friend is the same as being known? That is the same as being trusted or being loved. Surely such trust or friendship with our God is no "leap in the dark" as some people describe faith. Does God really ask us to take a chance, or gamble when we trust Him? Has He left us in the dark? Surely we have been warned that it is not safe to trust someone that we do not know. God does not ask us to trust Him as a stranger. Look at Rom. 10:17. Where does our faith or trust come from? "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (RSV) or "the word of God" (KJV). In those days people could not afford to have copies of the Bible themselves. They had to go and listen while someone else read the evidence to them. In this way many were won to confidence and repentance.

David surely knew what God wanted of His children way back in Old Testament times. Look at Ps. 51:6,10,16,17 You see, if a person has this kind of a relationship with God he will be willing to come before God humbly, willing to ask "what must I do to be well or to be saved?" And God says, "you need a new heart and a right spirit." Such a person would say, "please give me one as soon as possible."

Hosea understood all this when he said in Hosea 6:6,7, "It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But they, like Adam, have broken their agreement; again and again they have played me false." (Phillips) In Hebrew parallelism, the second line enlarges or confirms what he said in the first line. This then suggests that true love for God is equal to a knowledge of God. But God's people have repeatedly tried to cheat in this relationship. How much security can you have in a family when some of the children are cheating all the time? Jesus said the same thing to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (RSV) That is the same as what David had said in Ps. 51. Notice carefully that Jesus did not say, "unless you be forgiven" or "unless you be justified" or "unless your legal standing before God is adjusted, you cannot see the kingdom of God". He said, "unless you become changed", "unless you become a different person, a trustworthy member of my family it will not be safe to have you in the kingdom."

But the question comes, how can we know whether we have really been reborn, and that we have a right relationship with God? This is a question that was much debated in early Christianity, during the time of the reformation, and is still being vigorously debated today. One of the early church leaders wrote a whole book to try to answer this question. This book, the book of James, has

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proved to be very controversial down through the years. Please look at James 2:14,19,21-23 When Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, this was not a legal transaction with cash registers ringing and faith being somehow credited to Abraham. No. The word "counted" in this passage means "considered", or "reckoned as". God is saying, "Abraham trusts Me, and that is good, such a relationship will transform and heal him, and that's what I want, that is what it means to be right." The best evidence for this is the rest of the line in James 2:23, "elsewhere he is called God's friend".

But how much faith do we have to have? Do we have to trust God perfectly, and completely? Isn't that expecting too much? Shouldn't God allow for a little cheating? Have any of you husbands ever said to your wife, "Wife, how much can I cheat and have this marriage still survive?" Would such a thing make any sense? If a friend said to you, "How much can I lie to you and cheat you and still be your friend?" Would you be happy with the friendship? Such a thing makes no sense at all. Then for us to suggest that God needs to leave a little room for cheating in our relationship with Him certainly is foolish. Surely to ask for a perfect relationship is asking too much. Does it even make sense to raise the question?

When we cheat, and all of us have cheated, God still remains our Friend. But we may be destroying our side of the friendship, or even our very selves. You see, when we understand that God is asking us to be His friends, to have a loving, trusting relationship, it should be obvious that this is not something that God is demanding. It is an absolutely voluntary experience. The long debate between faith, works, and obedience has troubled saints for many years. But it could be easily resolved if we would look at the Biblical word for obedience. The Greek word is **hupakoe**. It means literally "listening under" -- a humble willingness to listen. This implies that if we love God, if we want to be His friends, we will be willing to humbly listen to what He says. It would be foolish for us not to listen to One we love, trust, and admire, and whom we know is seeking our best good.

Is it reasonable for God to expect our "willingness to listen" to be one hundred percent? Now He knows very well that our ability to do all that He asks -- our performance -- may be weak. We may stumble as we leave the Doctor's office, but being "willing to listen" -- is it too much to ask that there be no cheating there? Could we let our "willingness to listen" be one hundred percent?

If it seems that God is too demanding in asking such a relationship, it surely is encouraging to read about the heroes and heroines of faith celebrated in that great faith chapter, Hebrews 11. Look at verses 31,32 and following. After considering the lives of the people mentioned in this passage, can we possibly say that God is too demanding? He even holds up those people with all their faults and sins and weaknesses as people who were willing to listen. They were people who loved and trusted Him and were willing to wait for Him to heal the damage that had been done to them by sin. Then God puts their names in Heb. 11 for our encouragement.

Certainly the most encouraging story of all must be the story of the thief on the cross. see Luke 23:42 and 43. There they were. Jesus was hanging in the middle, and these thieves were on both sides cursing and swearing and mocking Jesus just as the rest of the crowd. Then something happened to one of the thieves. He heard Jesus saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing". He listened to Jesus say to John, "Please take care of my mother when I am gone". Maybe his heart was touched as he remembered his own mother. He looked at the sign over Jesus' head and perhaps he thought, if He ever really does have a kingdom, that would be the only kind of a kingdom that a thief like me would be safe in -- a kingdom where the King says, "I forgive you". "I need to be forgiven." Then he turned to Jesus and said, "If that's the kind of kingdom You are

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going to have, I would like to live in it". He wasn't even sure how Jesus would react. But when he asked, Jesus said, "I would be happy to have you in my kingdom".

Just imagine! He never had a chance to make restoration for any of the things that he had done wrong, to properly keep a Sabbath, or to pay tithe, or even to correct his diet or his lifestyle. But after he died, the very next thing he will see is the face of that same Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven. Jesus may say to him, "you have a lot to learn." Then the thief will say, "if You say so, it is all right with me." If something should happen to one of us today or tomorrow, I hope that we would know God well enough that in the resurrection we would not have any reason to be afraid. If, when we see Him face to face, He says, "you know that you still have a great deal to learn" we, because we have come to trust Him and admire Him will say, "that's fine with us".

You see "faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.

"Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God - based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed - to be willing to believe what He says, to accept what He offers, and to do what He wishes - without reservation - for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

"Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, Why?"

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Conversations About God - Tape 3B

Venden: Graham, I'm intrigued with one phenomenon here that we haven't commented on. We have had a number of people ask about the opening prayer. There has been no question about the offering.

Maxwell: Oh, that's true. No one has complained.

Venden: How would you explain that?

Maxwell: Maybe they would like us to take one up. [Laughter] That's a good thought.

Comment: God so loved the world He sent his Son; why didn't He come Himself?

Maxwell: Oh, that's fair enough. Yes. Why didn't He didn't come Himself? Because we could say, "Well He loved us enough to send somebody else." A lot depends on who we consider the Son to be.

Now, Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." And those of us who take the view that the Son was just as much God as the Father was God, and the Holy Spirit likewise a Member of the Heavenly Three, in a sense, the Holy Spirit could have come and occupied that role.

I don't believe history would have been one whit different, if the Father had come instead. Because They're just the same kind of People. They love us just as much. But why would it be the Son?

In this "larger view," as we're calling it— you know, this great controversy view, I see Christ in a similar role, sort of acting as a mediator way back in the beginning. He is described as Michael the Archangel.

And by the way, that name Michael - I don't know whether we'll have a chance to discuss this in the main auditorium — but Michael means "He who is like God"; or a question, "Who is like God?" And He's called Michael particularly in passages referring to the conflict — as if there was One who really was like God, and one who was claiming to be the substitute.

Well, I see Christ moving among the angels as an angel back in the beginning, you know. The Infinite One has always been infinite, and we very finite. And He's been the member of the Godhead, as it were, to bridge the gap, even before sin came in. And then when sin came in, He's still in that role now. And then He stoops still lower, and lower. And finally, as Philippians says, He even emptied Himself and became like one of us. So He's always been in that one role.

Venden: Now Graham, you said He moved among them as an angel. You mean appeared. . . ?

Maxwell: Appeared.

Venden: They got that impression.

Maxwell: That's right. But He was God.

Venden: It wasn't that He was an Angel and later was advanced?

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Maxwell: Right. You notice in the Old Testament sometimes, God is sometimes referred to as an angel. And then it seems to go back and forth. He's even described as a man. So, He's been very condescending, to meet His children where they are - as an angel to angels; as a man to men; but fully God.

So it would have made no difference. And I would also understand the Father suffered just as much as the Son. When the Son was in Gethsemane suffering, the Father in His infinite knowledge and wisdom and awareness, was suffering with the Son. I would see the whole Trinity doing this together. I mean, with my understanding, it would make no difference.

Now, if one sees the Son as maybe not God - as an inferior - then you do have a problem. And there are very devout Christians who take that view, you know — that the Son is something less than God. Then God so loved the world, He sent someone less. And I think we lose something then.

Comment: In Isaiah it says, "Wonderful Counselor"; it says "Everlasting Father." That's coming straight out of Hebrew; this is one of the best literal translations [unclear word] English.

Maxwell: Yes. I mean, the question is whether Christ really was God. The most potent verse in the Bible is Hebrews [Isaiah] 9: "Unto us a Son is born," you know. "Unto us a Child is given." And it's interesting. "His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor." Now, we usually reserve that for the Holy Spirit. He's the Counselor. And then "Everlasting Father" — well, we think of the Father; "Almighty God" - we think of the Father. "Prince of Peace" - we think of the Son.

So that wonderful baby is given the names of all three members of the Godhead, isn't He? Right there. So that's the most potent verse in the Bible. Hebrews [Isaiah] 9.

Hebrews. I'll tell you one very strong place. In the book of Hebrews 1 and 2 — Did I say Hebrews? I meant Isaiah. You mentioned the Hebrew. That's what did it to me. So, oh dear.

Venden: Glad we got straightened out.

Maxwell: Got that straight. In Hebrews now, chapters one and two, the writer - I like to say Paul; to me, it's the language of Luke and the theology of Paul, and they were together at the end. So I'll say Paul. He talks about the One who came. And he says that when Christ was born, God said to the angels, "Worship the Son."

And Romans says, You don't worship a created being. And yet God said to the angels, "Worship the Son." So that's further evidence that Christ is described as divine and as God in scripture. I think you can make a very strong case for that.

Then it's wonderful that He was willing to come in human form, and even die the death of a common criminal. But He's still God.

Comment: Yes. Did I hear you right, when I heard you say that love and knowledge was the same thing? Or is it the execution of knowledge?

Maxwell: In the Bible, to show that there is so much similarity, I use the word "know" in the Biblical sense. Which comes very close to "trust" and to "love" and all those other qualities. Now there may be some others, too; but there's something in common to them all, which makes them almost

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interchangeable in what God wants of us. If we trusted Him, we loved Him, we admired Him, we wanted to be His friend -- all that is describing the same.

Comment: I wonder if there is a Biblical quote for it, where it said that knowledge and love is the same thing?

Maxwell: Oh, you remember the text I read; that What God wants is love, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God, and not burnt offering? Now in the Hebrew - Hebrew is right this time! - in the Hebrew form, the writer will say something in the first line. Then he will seem to repeat it in the second line, but in different words. And that simply confirms or enlarges on the meaning of the first line. So that makes them quite equivalent there, you see. What God wants is love, not offering; the knowledge of God, not sacrifice. So it's making them quite equivalent - in that setting, of course.

Of course, what do we mean by love? Almost like "faith," that word means too much to be useful.

Comment: [unintelligible. . .] answered my question.

Maxwell: Yes!

Comment: Through the ages, God, when He had instituted Sabbath, he gave it to different people at different times. To the children of Israel, they had a knowledge of slaves and so forth; so He had to give certain specifications during that time.

What does Sabbath mean for those who are living now in 1984? What is the principle behind that, that I'm supposed to carry forth?

Maxwell: I think the subject you raised is so important, there's a whole evening on it. It's just that consequential. Because the Sabbath is so prone to misunderstanding. There's such ready opportunity to misunderstand it and turn it into just exactly what it's not supposed to be.

I believe that what God gave to be a monument to freedom, has been turned into the number one evidence of legalism. It's just a great, sad shame. And guess who would be behind it?

And especially now at the present time, we really need to understand the function of the Sabbath. To some of us, it reminds us of all the truth that sets us free, and the basis of our trust. To others, it's something you've got to do. "God has said it; I believe it; that's all there is to it."

In fact, it's sometimes described as an arbitrary test of obedience. There's not a single reason for keeping it, except that God said so. Now, that might be sweet for a beginner, but if you persist in that, it will do, I believe, great damage. It's just the opposite.

So one must really consider that in detail. All God asks is trust. And one of the greatest aids to trust is a meaningful observance of the Sabbath, if you remember all that it stood for. A mere test of obedience doesn't strengthen faith at all. But I believe the Sabbath was made for man. It was for us. We weren't made for the Sabbath.

Anyway, it's that important - it will be a whole session one evening. Yes, it demands to be understood. And of course, we Adventists as being a Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have it in our name. And we say, "We believe that all God asks of us is trust. And we have the seventh-day

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Sabbath in our name." Then I'm afraid the burden of proof really rests on us.

By taking that name, we owe it to all our friends, to explain how we can consistently say: "All God asks is trust. And if you knew the truth, the truth would set you free. And we very happily keep the Sabbath in the highest sense of freedom."

If we can't do that, we'd better be quiet for awhile and work it out. But I believe it really can be done - definitely; but not in one moment.

I can give you the arbitrary reason in one second. But the real one takes a little more time. You see, if God could settle things with a brief arbitrary statement, the Bible would be one paragraph long.

I like it that it took God so long to clear things up -- because it always take me quite a while. And you remember when Jesus was asked a question, His common response was, "Well, from the beginning it was not so." And He'd run it all the way through. Because my wife will often say when someone asks a question, "Why do you have to run the whole great controversy through?" Well, I remember Jesus did it quiet frequently. You remember? About divorce, that question.

"Well," He said, "from the beginning it was not so." And He went right back to the Garden of Eden. That's the more convincing answer; anything else is a shortcut -- not to be accepted unless you have reason to trust the person speaking.

So, I'd rather take the long view some other evening. I know you have many thoughts about this yourself, I'm sure.

Comment: Could you enlarge the concept of faith, a bit? It would seem that God would overwhelm us with His power here tonight. We might choose Him for the wrong reason, and not be able to develop faith in the right way. Paul Tillich says faith presupposes doubt."

Now, isn't it — wouldn't it be true that on this planet earth we have the privilege to develop faith in a unique way from the rest of the universe. Could you kind of enlarge that?

Maxwell: This really is next week, and it's that important. The way God has sought to restore trust and win our faith, is very, very crucial. In fact, the way He's — the methods He's used, are what convince me that He can be trusted.

As far as there being doubt is concerned -- I mean, the doubt is there in the universe. That's given with us, all right. There are questions of all kinds.

But how about way back in the beginning, before there ever was a war; why did anyone trust God? Do you have any evidence as to how God seeks to win and hold our trust? We have statements, but the Bible warns that the statement is a mere claim, and that's the poorest evidence. Rather, it's demonstration. As I'm sure I'll say next week. If a person has been accused of being untrustworthy, it does no good to stand up and say, "But I can be trusted!" Because your critics will say, "No, you can't!"

"Yes I can."

"No, you can't."

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"Yes I can; and I'm bigger than you are." And immediately you've almost admitted you can't be trusted. You had to have recourse to what would cancel it out, as you suggested.

As I understand it, whether God or man, even if you've been unfairly accused of being untrustworthy — only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances, particularly difficult ones, can trust be re-established and confirmed.

And that's why the Bible is so long. We have all this evidence. And finally, we even have God on this earth. And, in case you can't come next week, to me the clincher in it all is, the way Jesus tried to convince the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

You remember, here were these two men who had such urgent questions. They deserved answers. They said, "We had hoped He would be the One; and now He's dead. And Jesus walks with them, but He clearly says in Scripture, he didn't reveal who he was.

Now, if God was inclined to overwhelm us with His power, Jesus would only have to have appeared, you know, resurrected, even in His human form, you know; they would have been overwhelmed.

And He'd say, "What are your questions? Here are the answers, and I expect you to believe it." He didn't reveal who He was; He took them through the Scriptures. It says, "He took them through the Old Testament. And then when He had led them to an intelligent confidence, based upon the evidence, He did reveal who He was. So it's quite apparent that even God Himself does not ask us to believe Him because of who He is.

And think who He is! Because there's someone going around pretending to be Him. And he's the one who uses that method: See who I am. See my miracles and my power. Now do you believe me? You better not! And yet so much in religion, this the approach. Look at the miracle; look at the wonder. The Bible says he'll bring down fire from heaven and many will be deceived.

God says, "Practice with Me, and you'll be ready when the deceiver comes. I don't ask you to believe without evidence. I'd rather not even reveal who I am to you, until I've helped through the Scriptures and you see the accumulating evidence. Then when you agree, then I might tell you who's been talking to you."

I think Emmaus is one of the greatest demonstrations that God would not like to do the sort of thing you don't like either — overwhelm us with His Majesty and Power. If He used that method, I wouldn't trust Him. How do you feel?

Comment: Does perfect knowledge mean perfect faith? Or does there always have to be some little element of doubt [Maxwell: Oh, no!] for faith to be exercised on?

Maxwell: We'll you don't to have to have doubts. By doubt, do you mean question? We're always free to question.

Comment: A man could follow his wife around all day long and not exercise faith; but once he separated from her, he might have to exercise faith if she's behaving herself or something like that.

Maxwell: Hopefully, he has some evidence for that faith. If he had evidence to the contrary, he might

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not be bright to go away.

Yes. So the question is, How much evidence do we have for God?

Comment: [unintelligible. . .] evidence that some element where you exercise faith - a question - an element of doubt?

Maxwell: I wouldn't want to think that the thought would have to pass through my mind at least once a day, that maybe my wife is fooling around, for me to reaffirm my faith. It doesn't come to my mind at all.

And I think that the angels - they never thought that about God. It was not until sin came in and the devil began raising questions, that— truly they were free to entertain those questions; and one-third of them agreed with him.

But another point you made is very crucial. I believe you could know God perfectly well, and still vote against Him. I think the perfect knowledge, does not force you to vote "yes." You could know God very well, and still turn against Him.

I believe that all that knowledge does, is to give us the opportunity to vote intelligently. But I'm still free to vote "no," because Lucifer, the light-bearer, was in His very Presence. Nobody knew God better than the light-bearer; and he rebelled against Him. So that's why knowledge alone wouldn't do it.

Unless it be the "know" you were talking about. In the Bible, when you talk about really knowing God, that means know in the sense of to know, love, trust and admire. Some would have to watch that in the various places.

Mere knowledge of the truth does not guarantee how I'll vote. But if I really know God, I might vote that I like that, and I want to stay with Him. --Then that would be the other meaning of "know".

Venden: I'm intrigued by what I feel behind this questioner; and I have it in my own heart as well. It came out a bit in there— as Abraham is called by God, there is some struggle and uncertainty.

Maxwell: Oh, yes.

Venden: And that seems to be perhaps concomitant with faith. But then what you said earlier about being in the Presence of God, saying "Well, I don't need faith anymore because I see," doesn't make good sense.

Maxwell: Yeah.

Venden: The angels trusting God never having any question at all in their minds. So, and, I find myself. . .

Maxwell: Could this be true: since He is infinite — you know in a way, His ways are way, way above our ways — I think for all eternity He may say things and ask us to do things that are beyond our present understanding, you see.

Venden: And we'll still be looking ahead. . .

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Maxwell: Yes, it might [we might be saying] "How can that be? But I'm with You, Lord, because I've seen you and know You can be trusted. And lo, it works out as it did for Abraham.

Venden: All right.

Maxwell: I think His infinity would always raise that possibility, you know. And that's why I love to be able to say, that if we really know God as Abraham and Moses did, we'll realize that without fear, but reverently, we can ask Him "Why?"

When we talk about "There Is No Need To Be Afraid of God," one night, these are some of the most stirring things in the Bible; when God came to Abraham and said, "I'm going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah," Abraham said, "But God You wouldn't!" — you know — "if there were fifty, forty, thirty. I mean, God, shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" That's incredible! And God was not offended. He said, "You really are My friend.

And when He said to Moses: "Step aside. Let me destroy these people and make a great nation of you," Moses said, "You couldn't do it! I mean, it would ruin Your reputation! What would the Egyptians think?"

And God didn't say, "That offends Me no end; I said step out of the way and let Me destroy the people. Where's your bumper sticker?" — "If God has said it, I believe it; that's all there is to it."

And Moses says, "No! I neither have that bumper sticker on, nor do I think You could do this. No, I know You too well."

God says, "You're right. And I love to hear you say it, and all the angels to hear you say it. I've been telling them you're My friend; and you've shown it one more time." So those two men did it.

And then of course the whole book of Job is the classic on this. The theologians were terrified for Job. He was questioning God! And they thought he'd be zapped on the dung heap any minute, you know. And they loved him, and they didn't want him to have worse suffering than the boils. Maybe he'll only live another minute - one more word from him!

And God intervenes and says, "Job, magnificent! You have said of Me what is right."

So if we really know God well enough, we realize He wants us to ask "why?" If we don't ask "why?" it suggests we're not interested. But we are.

So from Abraham to say "God, I'm not just on my way with my son - makes no sense, but if You've said it, I believe it, that's all there is to it." He agonized on the way -- because God had given this son miraculously to be the father of many nations. And "God, I can't make sense of this!" I think that was more distressing than actually sacrificing his son. Here goes the promise! you know.

But then he thought - it says in Romans right there - that even with the birth of Isaac, which also was incredible. You remember, both Abraham and Sarah laughed. We men often point to the fact that Sarah laughed. The Bible says Abraham laughed too.

Well, if you were that old, and were told you were going to have a baby, what you do? You know.

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Right off. Spontaneously. And they both laughed. And then they were embarrassed that they had laughed. God says, "I'm not going to hold that against you. I'll put you both in Hebrews 11 [laughter], as heroes of faith — see — Because they did trust.

But you know what it says in Romans? Well, in the King James it says that Abraham did not consider how old his body was. The early manuscripts say he took a good look. And he looked at Sarah and says, "No way!" But then it says in Romans, that he began to think. This is the God who created us all in the first place, out of nothing. And if He says we can a baby, I believe He can do it.

And so later on, when God says, "Take the baby, take him - now a boy, a man - and sacrifice him," Abraham said, "I mustn't forget how I got him in the first place. And you're the One who created everything in the beginning. God, I don't know how You're going to do this. And until I find out, I'm going to suffer. I know it's going to be all right. I know it will. I mean, maybe You'll provide a substitute? Maybe You'll resurrect my son? I mean, I know You can do it." But Abraham wasn't relieved until it happened.

And so there is, you know, the agonizing thinking that goes on. Abraham is a real example of this really knowing God and having faith. It asks questions - might even suffer until the solution comes - but stays with God.

Comment: What do you think that the lesson was in this story of Abraham? Why do you think that God asked him to offer Isaac?

Maxwell: Well, my understanding would be that he was obviously a trusted friend of God; and the whole universe is looking on. And God loves to speak with pride of His friends.

I mean, look at Job. Here it speaks of the whole heavenly family together. And God says to the adversary, "Have you considered My friend Job? He's perfect, and upright, and faithful. I really trust him."

So obviously, God likes to talk to the heavenly family about His friends down here - He has that few, that when He gets a really good one, He loves to speak with pride. He's done this of others.

Well, Abraham, what a friend he was. But he let God down on more than one occasion. He lied twice about his wife - who was so beautiful, you remember, that these other men were interested in her.

By the way, have you checked Sarah's age at that time? It's extraordinary! She was quite old - and wonderfully preserved!

And you'll checked the record there, that these kings thought that she would be very nice to steal away from her husband. Which kings were prone to do those days; murder the husband and take the wife.

So Abraham was worried. And he forgot about God being able to take care of the emergency. Just as Adam in the Garden of Eden said, "God, I don't know; I mean, if I joint my wife and die with her, am I going to lose my wife? I don't see how You can handle this."

Adam should have said: "God, I don't know how You're going to handle this, but You made us in the beginning. I'll leave it up to You." But he didn't. He tried to work out a solution.

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Abraham tried to work out a solution with respect to his wife, and said, "She's my sister." And, you know, she was very closely related; very closely. More than that, if you wanted your wife to inherit your estate, you had to adopt her as your sister anyway.

So that lie is so pale, it hardly registers on the scale. I mean, he almost told the truth. It's that good a lie. And so it isn't that detail that was bad. It's that Abraham was not trusting God as a friend should. And I'm sure the adversary was enjoying this. And you know how he tours the universe, to put God in a bad light. He says, "Look, see this man God calls His friend; look at him cheating and lying down there. He really doesn't trust Him."

Didn't he say that of Job? "Job only trusts God because God bribes him," and so on. So I would see God testing Job — not for arbitrary reasons. But he gives the man a chance to show he really is a trusting friend.

You remember how he [Abraham] didn't trust in the matter of Isaac being born. And when Sarah said, "Let's follow the custom," --again, it didn't seem so bad. They did it all the time. Look at Jacob and his wives. You know; later on. And she says, "Take my handmaiden Hagar."

And so he made that mistake. And due to that, we have the PLO today. That's true, isn't it? They're all descended from Hagar and Ishmael; and so, think of all the problems that have come to our planet because people have not trusted God to let Him solve the problem.

God says, "Abraham, let Me give you the ultimate test. Take your son - your only son - the one who was born miraculously - and sacrifice him."

And Abraham said, "God, I really don't know how You're going to work this out; but I'm not going to lie out of it, and I'm not going to find some other way out of it. I'm going to go right through with it." And so this time he trusted God.

And I could imagine when the angel held his hand, God turned to the universe and said, "Any more questions about My friend Abraham? Silence, adversary; you can't say Abraham doesn't trust Me."

So I would see it in that light. It would have to be for some such purpose. Plus, of course, the symbolic meaning. But I don't think that was the major one. There is a very interesting parallel indeed. God sacrifices His Son. But I think the main thing, as far as Abraham was concerned, was, he was given an opportunity to show what a trusting friend he was.

And God has done that with several other people in the Bible. And I wonder if we let Him down -- I mean, we're being accused day and night before God (Revelation 12:10) -- would God bring us over the same ground and give us a chance to prove we're His trusting friends? I wonder whether that means we'll have to go through, some of us? But if we'll willing, and He's the Doctor, we'll let Him take us through; and stop figuring out our own solutions to some of these things.

What do you think though, on that? You raised — to me that's a very important question.

Comment: Well, I read something that God was trying to show that children shouldn't be sacrificed. Because that was common custom. And that He didn't require Human sacrifice, and that He didn't want it. And so I wondered if you had . . .

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Maxwell: Well, if you were to take that solution then, you'd have to apply that right through the Bible. When you read something that seems to go against our Christian ethical standards, then it must not have happened, or God was trying to show that it was not a good thing to do.

When God asked Hosea to marry a woman of dubious reputation, did He really do it? And several other things in the Bible. When God asked the Israelites - told them - that in battle they should kill the women, and the children, and the babies, and leave alive nothing that breathes. Now, you know the background. He never wanted them to fight in the first place. Did He then not tell them to do this in battle? When Saul did not kill King Agag, and Samuel took a sword and hewed King Agag in pieces before the Lord; was Saul more right than Samuel?

I mean, once you begin introducing these qualifications into Scripture, I don't know where you can stop. I'd rather take it the way it reads; and find a consistent reason that requires the very least manipulation of the text. And I think there is another way to look at it.

And in that connection, I have an evening on "God's Emergency Measures". Remind me to discuss that. It is an emergency measure, to be sure.

Comment: I have many non-Adventist friends. And they always get the feeling that Adventists are people who can't do, and can't do — and you are a good Adventist; you're doing so many things that our message[?] equates with salvation. You can't lose that [unclear word] in the illustration you gave - not to say that we're, you know, totally — do whatever you want, and be saved. But could you illustrate more. Having a certain detrimental[?] attitude as to how you relate to external behaviors, with that as far as salvation is concerned.

Maxwell: Yes. Of course, this is a very old problem all through scripture, you know. I think it's born from many understandings. But basically, say; were you here last week when we talked about three ways of looking at the Plan of Salvation? You see. Some obey God out of fear. I mean, you'd better do it! If you don't do these things, you won't go to Heaven. In fact, you'll go some other place.

And they're willing to live with this. They don't like it, necessarily, but you know, who wants to go to Hell? Who wants to miss out on Heaven? That's a rather elementary view which doesn't lead to a very good relationship with God. A very mechanical one. And then we tend to be that kind of people.

Then of the second one was: As sinners, we're in legal trouble; in order to please our God and to meet all the legal requirements, we not only accept the legal payment, but now we too must keep the Law; but He works within us to help us do it, and so on. But we wind up with the heavy burden. We have a long blueprint of details. And we're dedicated to doing it.

But we say, "We don't do this because we're afraid of God. We do this because we love Him and want to please Him. And boy, you'd better please Him! Or you know what will happen." And it's no better than the first. So I think our motivation for obedience can be described in various ways worth consideration and comparison.

There is the Adventist who will say: "I do what I do, because God has told me to. And He has the power to reward and destroy."

Another would say: "I do what I do as an Adventist, because God has told me to. And I love Him, and

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want to please Him."

There is another. And this person may be obeying the blueprint even in more detail than the other two: "I do what I do as a Christian," say - "even as a Seventh-day Adventist — because the longer I live, the more I'm finding it to be right and sensible to do so. But I have great respect and gratitude for the One who so commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity."

Hastening to add: "Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I'm willing to obey His commandments when He asks me to do something beyond my present understanding. But I look forward to the day when I can stand in God's Presence and say, 'God, I'll do all these things for the rest of eternity, whether You ask me to or not; because I believe it's right.'"

And He says, "Now you're free." And the ultimate goal is to do what's right because it is right, and not because we're told to.

And, you know, Ellen White - for our non-Adventist friends, you know, she's thought to be the ogre who has all these blueprinting details, you know — Now, here's her understanding. She says: "The man who obeys from a sense of obligation merely because he is required to do so, never enters into the joy of obedience. In fact, he does not obey. Only the man who does what's right because it is right, really obeys and really pleases God."

Now, I wish to go on record that that's Ellen White's view. But the here-a-little there-a-little thing, has put here in a bad light. Just as Paul, and Hosea, and all the rest, have suffered. And all of us too, can be misquoted. But take her as a whole, it's a message of real freedom. "Do what's right because it is right."

Now, how does that fit Sabbath? See, that's going to be in there too.

So I am afraid we are a mixed bunch. Every group is like that. You know there are all kinds. Sure. That's normal, isn't it?

We might give the impression we are a rest home for the saints. But you know, you've heard this before: We are a hospital for the sick. And even our physicians, our clergy, are under therapy. You know, the whole lot of us are. And what I like is, that like the Mayo Clinic, so many very sick people come to our hospital because they think we might have something to offer. So if we have some very troubled people in our church, that could be a compliment. It's a place to get help.

But don't look for everybody to be perfectly healthy, or they'd be on their way somewhere else, maybe. We have a job to do. And maybe we will have a greater mixture before we're through, if it becomes apparent we have something worth having, something to offer - which I believe we do.

So I'm afraid that would vary from person to person.

Comment: I hope this is all right to ask this question; it's on faith.

Maxwell: That's the subject of the evening; you're right!

Comment: That's what I thought. But everything else seems to be a little bit deeper than what I'm going to ask. Faith isn't [sic] something that God gives people; and He gives some people more than He gives somebody else. You know, I mean, I've heard that along the way, that God gives gifts to people; and He gives you more faith than He might give this person and that person. But gradually

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this other person will finally get up a little bit closer to what you have, or I have, or somebody else has. Is that true?

Maxwell: Well, we have to start with the Biblical statement, you know. We have different gifts, and some have more of this and more of that.

Comment: Well, is it a gift, then?

Maxwell: The capacity to exercise trust - some seem to have it more at first, maybe. But watch that that not be gullibility. Some people regard their willingness to believe everything, faith. They're the ones that get ripped off by salesmen at the door. You don't want to be that trusting!

Comment: When you say, "My faith looks up to," you're thinking about God. You're asking something of Him, really, when you're putting out faith, aren't you? — "My faith looks up to You?"

Maxwell: Well, the faith there means . . .

Comment: Something inside of me is trusting you to do what I'm going to ask you.

Maxwell: Now, why do you already trust?

Comment: Hum?

Maxwell: Why do you already trust enough to "look up to Thee?" "My faith looks up?" What made you want to look up?

Comment: Because you wanted something.

Maxwell: But maybe you're looking in the wrong direction. Maybe you're looking at Jim Jones.

Comment: No, you're thinking of something. . .

Maxwell: And you're on your way to Guyana.

Comment: No. You're thinking of something spiritual. "My faith."

Maxwell: Well, his 900 followers had enough faith, to commit suicide - in his name. They call that faith. You know to look up at the One you're talking about, because you already know something about Him. Isn't that true?

Comment: Yes. But I don't maybe have the same faith that you have, or somebody else has. And that's why I may not to get my answers. I'm not getting some of the answers that I want, and I don't know why! And yet my faith. . .

Maxwell: It depends on the questions you're asking. [Laughter]

Comment: My faith . . .

Maxwell: Yes.

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Comment: I . . . oh, I don't know!

Maxwell: No, you're doing this beautifully. Actually, the way you're asking it is the most useful of all. That's the best way to do it.

Comment: Well, I'm just like a child. . .

Maxwell: That's right.

Comment: I'm asking something of Him, but I'm not getting the results that you would get if you asked from Him. And so I say to myself, "Well, He hasn't given me the faith that I need, then. How do I get this faith?"

Maxwell: Well, go back to the idea that faith is trust. As you know God, do you regard Him as absolutely worthy of your trust? Is He absolutely trustworthy? If He would communicate with you, you'd take Him most seriously.

Comment: Yes, right.

Maxwell: All right.

Comment: But then it says if you have the faith as a mustard seed, you'll get the results. Well, I know I have that much faith.

Maxwell: Well, let's try that.

Comment: Don't you have that much faith?

Maxwell: If you had that much faith, the Lord says you could say to this mountain, "Be removed and cast into the depths of the sea." So have you tried this on San Gorgonio maybe lately, and it hasn't gone? [Laughter]

Comment: I don't think of it as a mountain. I think of it as some difficulty — the mountain is a difficulty. It's a problem that you've got.

Maxwell: Ah! Now you're doing an interesting thing. See, if you knew God that well, you wouldn't be wanting to move mountains around. I mean, it wouldn't make any sense, would it? That's just a dramatic way of saying just what you said: If you really trusted God, in cooperation with Him, there are no problems that you could not solve. Maybe not now, but a little later. Yes. You trust Him.

All right, now you ask Him a question. How do the answers come? You say, "If I had more faith, I would have. . ." Well, take Gideon: Sometimes he's under the heading of great faith, because he had enough faith to put a fleece outside and ask, "Lord, "Please, I want it to be wet in the morning."

Comment: But we wouldn't do that.

Maxwell: Who had more faith: you or Gideon? If you had more faith, would you want wet fleeces and dry ones? Or did Gideon ask for that because he had so little faith, that he needed a wet fleece and

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then a dry one?

You don't ask for signs. You know God well enough, and you trust His Word. And you read it. And you believe He helps you understand. Now ask the right questions, and you'll get answers.

Venden: But she is speaking for many of us with this idea, Graham, that if we only had more faith, more would happen.

Maxwell: Do you want to give an example of that? That would be good.

Venden: Well, people would be healed.

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: Yes. Like my. . .

Comment: People say to me, "If you have faith, then why aren't you healed?"

Maxwell: Ah. All right. Let's test that.

Comment: And I get pretty mad at that!

Maxwell: Well, now, see; you already handled it, you see. You've already taken advantage of that.

Comment: No, I'm missing something here.

Maxwell: Yes. This is good.

Comment: I mean, I've had this happen to me so many, many times, I tell you, I just . . . I want Him, because [unclear] [laughs]. . .

Maxwell: Is it that if we had more faith, we'd have more miracle?

Venden: Yes, I think that's the temptation. . .

Maxwell: Would that be it, maybe?

Comment: We'd have more miracles, that's true.

Maxwell: Let's try that, though; would we? Let's go through the Bible and pick books where there's great faith as in the book of Job. And a book where there's hardly any faith at all; say, oh, what shall I pick? In the days of the prophet Elisha. In those days, axheads floated, and all kinds of things happened. Was there any faith in those days?

Why, the king of Israel was consulting Beelzebub the god of flies; and it was a terrible period. In fact, there was no reverence for God at all. Those youths, you know, that had heard about Elijah being translated. Their only reaction was to say to Elisha, "Hey Baldy, why don't you go up, too?" There was no faith, no reverence, no listening to God at all. And yet there were miracles. Miracles by the dozen!

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I would say, More faith, less miracle of that kind. Job got none.

Comment: I'd sure like to be able to answer some of these people, why a person doesn't have healing when they've showed the faith to have it. Because they'll say, "Oh, we must have a lot of sins back there, you know, behind you; God isn't going to give it to you."

Maxwell: This works beautifully, because that's the whole book of Job, you see. When Job lost his health, lost his money . . .

Comment: I'm tired of trying to explain it to them.

Maxwell: Have them read Job. They'll say, "I don't want to do that. I want my answers straight." They like a red, hot line to Heaven, those folk. And they won't read the Scriptures, have you noticed?

But if we're willing to read the Scriptures, we will learn that the devil is the one who would like to have us depend on miracle. He can counterfeit, you know. But God wishes us to have a calm trust, based on the weight of evidence. That's real faith; and that's what Job had.

Now, when Job got into trouble, the friends said, "You must have sinned, or you wouldn't be like this." Up in Heaven, God is saying, "The man hasn't sinned; he's perfect." The book of Job is for grownups. And when we're grown up, we don't need miracles to trust God. We just need the great demonstration of His trustworthiness, to trust Him.

God's very kind, though, when we're little. If we need wet fleeces and dry ones, they'll come; He'll do it. But He'd rather use the other.

So, say in your case, you haven't had a miracle for a few days, that you could recognize as a miracle. That may be a compliment to you. God knows you will trust Him without anything like that. If you have to have a wet fleece in the morning to decide whether to go to church or not, then you're just starting out. That's true. But you don't need that.

Comment: Well, now, that's a beautiful thought; I'll hang on to that. [Laughter] [a few unintelligible words] I got the feeling that He knows that I can trust Him even if He doesn't heal me.

Maxwell: Exactly.

Comment: That's what I need -- thanks for the answer.

Maxwell: Okay.

Venden: I'm glad you had the courage to ask that for all of us.

Maxwell: Yes! Now, that's the best. Thank you very much.

Comment: Thank you so much; I can go home praising the Lord now!

Maxwell: OK.

Comment: It's all part the same question; we talk a lot about it: If you have the trust, you trust God,

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then the healing is guaranteed.

Maxwell: Ultimately.

Comment: Ultimately. Okay, that's the question. Now, there's a thing of as far as performance. You maybe convinced of what is right, and you want to do it because it is right; but you can't do it! I mean, when is that taken care of? How does He do it?

Maxwell: Yeah, Oh, this is tremendously significant. This is what Paul ran into. He surely trusted God. He's the one who wrote all about this. But then he says, "I find that the good that I want to do, I don't do; and the evil that I don't want to do, is what I do."

Then he says, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this doomed body?" Because he said, "With my mind, I'm sold on this! I delight in the law of God. But I seem to find in my body another principle at work, that's at enmity with my convictions."

He even says, "So with my mind I serve the law of God; but with my body" - and he wasn't suggesting that well, "you can destroy my body and take my soul to Heaven; because my soul is with you. It's all one piece."

My understanding would be - and this deals beautifully with that verse, "God sent His Son to deal with sin," because forgiveness doesn't get rid of that struggle. The bad habits are there, many years' development and accumulation. And I wouldn't want God to settle for just forgiving me and letting me in with all of this unresolved. I want Him to do away with it. I want to come to the place where I don't even want to do what's wrong.

Then Paul said, "You know what helped me on that? I read the Ten Commandments again." He said, "I used to read the Ten; had them posted on my bedroom wall. And every morning I'd get up and read them, and promise to obey. In the evening I'd come back check them through, and see if I needed to repent. And I hadn't murdered anybody, and hadn't stolen anything; and I hadn't broken the Sabbath because it was Wednesday anyway." And he said, "This was a good day. I thank Thee I'm not like other men."

"Then," he said, "I began to read them more carefully. And I read Number Ten, which says, 'Thou shalt not only not do anything wrong; thou shalt not even want to.'"

And Paul said, "Now, I used to think that I got extra credit because of that commandment; because I did want to, but I didn't do it." He said, "If you don't want to do; I mean, too old to sin, why do you get any credit? You're just tired out!" you see.

But if you're a young man like Paul, and you want to sin, but you don't do it; now that gets credit. In a legal situation, it gets credit. But I don't want to settle for that.

Paul says, "Evidently what the Ten Commandments describe is a person who doesn't even want to sin. And that's a new heart and a right spirit, and complete healing."

And then he realized he hadn't been healed at all. He just had come under discipline, you know, for whatever reason. He had a fearsome God! That's why evangelism, for him, was persecuting people - in God's name.

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So it took a little time for this to be absorbed. And he said, "I now realize the meaning of Number Ten. And I long for the day when I'll not even want to sin. But wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this doomed body?"

Next chapter. Don't ever stop! "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He sent His Son to deal with sin, to do away with it." You notice that one version last week? "Do away with it!" Forgiveness doesn't do away with it. We look forward to this being completely healed. And we come to the place where we won't even want to sin. And the healing isn't through 'til then.

Comment: Is that here, or is that in Heaven?

Maxwell: Yes. That starts right away! But you see, you might like Moses, have a shock of one step from the Kingdom, that lo and behold you have an unsuspected weakness within! I think Moses was shocked. I suspect he repented before that rod reached the rock: "I've done it! I can't believe it! I thought I had the victory over this a long time ago! I've shown such composure these forty years, you know, under such pressure. And that thing is still in there, that led me to kill that Egyptian!"

You know. It was still in there. And I think God reveals our weaknesses, and our bad habits and sinfulness, to us as we are able. And Moses accepted it. He said, "God, I'm ashamed of myself! I'm sorry. Can You do anything about it?"

And God says, "Well actually, this very experience is taking care of it." But he was mighty sorry that he had done that thing.

So I would say: as long as life shall last, we remain God's patients. And I'm not insisting that my Doctor tell me exactly when I'm going to be perfect. All I'm concerned about, is that I remain His trusting patient, because I have an infallible Physician who has never ever lost a case. But He can't heal me if I don't turn up regularly and cooperate.

So I know that if I have faith -- which will be shown by my willingness to listen, keep my appointments, commune with God -- I know He will absolutely heal me. And I'm not dictating to Him when. Because I might not get home tonight. I could die on the way home. So I'd better die His trusting patient. And then I don't worry.

This perfection thing has been used by the adversary to really burden us and turn us against God as demanding. No, all He's offering is, "Would you like to be perfectly well?" And we say, "Well, You can't do it. I don't believe it." Or, "I don't want to be that well. I mean, couldn't I be half well?" Who would say that to a doctor? Especially if you were terminally ill. You know, and we are terminally ill as sinners.

And He says, "I offer you - I don't require you - I offer you perfect healing." You say, "Well, I don't want to be that healthy." Isn't that what we say, though, when we say you can't be perfect? He says, "I say you can if you want to be." So really, perfection doesn't worry me. What worries me, is I might be cheating with my Doctor.

Comment: What if the doctor says you need to give up smoking, and you agree; but you just can't give up smoking?

Maxwell: Yes. Now, how do you do that? And we Adventists have been working on that, haven't we

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in various ways? And all kinds of methods will work.

My understanding would be that He has a solution to anything you can name. There is no condition that could not be handled in cooperation with the One who made us. So if a person has gone years, and years, and years, and has not had the victory over something, it calls for some self-examination. I mean, have I really been, in the most intelligent way, cooperating regularly and faithfully with my Heavenly Physician?

And usually most of us would have to say, "I don't know anybody who has been following consistently along, who hasn't had good results." But you raise an interesting problem. But that fits in with what you said, though. Some feel if I had more faith, I'd lose the desire to smoke overnight. It doesn't come that way, does it?

Comment: . . . that would probably scare them enough [they would] to stop smoking either cigarettes or marijuana. So I think that would be a good solution. That tells you what the cigarette commercials do not tell you about cigarette smoking. This one tells you what marijuana effects you, and the fact that you only have between 25 and 30 instead of 34 chromosomes in the cells of your brain when you're done.

Venden: The scare tactic doesn't always work.

Maxwell: That's the trouble.

Comment: It should.

Maxwell: It should work? Well, if the scare tactic is . . .

Comment: . . . you start out with about 18 times as many brain chromosomes, or whatever, than other people.

Maxwell: If fear was the best method, God would have ended the war a long time ago. Because He could have terrified us to death. But the Bible is a source of one illustration after another, that fear has never won anybody. He drowned all but eight; and how did the eight behave, and the ones who were descended from them?

After Sodom and Gomorrah, did everybody behave? All fear may do - that is, a demonstration of God's fearsome Presence - is get us irreverent rebels to pay attention and hear Him say, "I don't like doing it this way, but I had to do it. Now I have your attention. Please listen so I won't have to do it again."

So fear doesn't win. Fear gets attention. And that explains, I think, hundreds of stories in the Bible. By the way, that comes up in How To Evaluate the Evidence of Scripture, one evening — that kind of a story. Yes.

Venden: I have wondered in my own experience, and in the experience of others who have struggled with something say - like this, if one of the enemy's prize tactics there, is to get the attention focused on the problem.

Maxwell: Oh, this is a good point.

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Venden: And rather than on the One whom we come to know is life eternal, to trust, and so forth; it seems to me that he works very skillfully that way, to where the whole desire is: "How am I doing?" I want to give up smoking," for example. It becomes the total focus. And as you were suggesting, to evaluate our lives in terms of that relationship of trust with Him, even to the point of placing that in His hands, rather than being so eager for victory that I can, Aha, I've made it! you know. I mean, "Lord help me, " but. . . I just wonder if that doesn't enter in there, a bit.

Maxwell: Oh, I think so. And that brings up the matter of what legalism is. I think the legalist wants to be saved. And he gets the blueprint out. And he's preoccupied with his legal standing with God; and wants to do whatever's necessary, believe whatever's necessary, so he'll be in good legal standing.

That kind of person who is preoccupied with his legal understanding, is often preoccupied with his own performance, and so on. The man of faith - faith meaning love, trust and admiration for God - is preoccupied with the truth about God. And that's what inspires him. That's what encourages him. And when you think of the way God does things, that's good news. When you're thinking about what you do, then, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this doomed body?"

And I think what Dr. Venden said is crucial: that the message about trust and faith focuses our attention on God. The way He does things. You say, "Well, you'll never become perfect that way. You've got to work on yourself." Well, the message of Scripture is: It's a law that we become like the Person we worship and admire. And the only way to become like God, is to think a great deal about Him. And then like what we see. We like His ways.

You know, Willie Mays — that basket catch, you know, in the outfield, was simply incredible! I watched him in Candlestick Park. There were only two times I ever went there. It was marvelous to see him. And all the kids tried to catch the same way. They admired him so.

Look at the Beatles. When they hove on the scene, you remember, from Liverpool, with their haircuts and their music; everybody was doing it that way. All the boys wanted to cut their hair like them.

We tend to become like the people we worship and admire. Well, if God is the One - we're preoccupied with Him; He's the subject of Scripture; and we're led to admire, love and trust Him; don't worry about becoming like Him. It is a law, we will become more and more like the One we worship and admire.

Comment: On this temptation, I think that we're told that we won't be given temptation more than what we can bear. God will, you know, give us the energy and the help to overcome these temptations. I like to think that if there's a temptation or some problem comes up, God trusts me; with His help, the two of us can get over it. Now. . .

Maxwell: That means if you collapse, He didn't allow you to be tested more than you were able to bear; you just collapsed. I mean, in other words, you can't blame Him. In fact, you remember it says in James, that when we sin, don't say "I've been tempted by God." And you expect the sentence to end, "I've been tempted by the devil."

That isn't what James says. Because when you sin, you've probably been led away by your own desires and enticed. I think most of the time, the devil is relaxing on the Riviera; because we're all so programmed in these bad habits, he never has to make a move. It's only when we try to make a

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break, that he gets worried and calls in his lieutenants and say, "Let's work on that man."

And God would not allow the devil to work on us more than we're able to bear. As with Job. You remember, He said, "You may not take his life." Although I would say with Job, there were no holds barred, short of taking his life. And that's the ultimate compliment. God said, "That man can take everything, and he will not let Me down." It would be nice to know that God could say that of us. The reason why we don't go through so much is, He knows maybe we couldn't take it. We should eat humble pie. You know.

Comment: Then the problems: A lot of people will say, "Well, I've got certain problems," and so forth. I think, as I recall my college years, I would spend many hours on some of those calculus problems, trying to work on them, to get a solution. And many times, if I had looked toward the solution end, I would have had the problem; I would have taken care of the problem. So I think that when we have a problem in anything, whatever it is, Christ is our solution. And if we would concentrate on Him, and emulate Him in our lives, the problem disappears; all we have is solutions.

Maxwell: Yes. I guess the real question is how you do that. You know, you're dealing with a problem in calculus, and you think about Christ; and it doesn't seem to help with the problem. So, I mean, how does that help? How do you think about Christ? How do you do this? Anyway, that calls for practical application.

Comment: What would Christ do in a situation that I'm involved in? How would He handle it?

Maxwell: Now, what I like about that is, when you think about Christ, you think about Someone who is concerned about the whole universe; not just you, not just this world. And it helps you think about the larger view. And so you're saying to Christ, "How do I solve this problem?" And what He's trying to say is, "From the larger viewpoint, you shouldn't be there in the first place." You know. "You're in the wrong place. I mean, take a larger view of things, and maybe move to somewhere else. Take up another line of work."

And our problem so often is, our nose is so close to the problem - just as with the early Christians, you see. All they could see was; the Second Coming was delayed, the apostles were dying off, their relatives were dying. They'd hoped to live to see the Lord come. There were heresies, and all the rest. And the remedy was the Book of Revelation. Take a larger view of things, and then you can put up with all this disappointment and irritation of the moment.

I think Jesus on the cross did that. The only way He could survive what He went through, was to think of the enormous issues at stake. The security of the whole universe! The reason why He had come. And all the evidence that His Father could be trusted, even though He seemed to have deserted Him at the time.

And so He could say, "Into Thy hands, I commit My spirit." He really rose above the irritations of the moment, and took the larger view of things. And I think often the answer is the larger view, than our getting a solution to the immediate problem, you know. Sometimes we just try to repair little holes in the inner tube; when what you need is a whole new wheel, maybe.

Comment: The larger view of it then, would be the solution.

Maxwell: That's right. That is. And that's the beauty of Christianity. It's not your nose to the blueprint.

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It's looking up to take a much larger view of things.

And then the blueprint is, "Do you want to know how to run this IBM personal computer? I suggest you read the directions. I'm trying to learn now; I've got five folders on the thing! And it won't run right, I guess, until I've learned more of it. I don't feel insulted to have the blueprint that I need as to how to handle this thing. Because I want to be able to run it.

Venden: Graham, let's take one more; it's almost time.

Maxwell: All right.

Comment: I love very much very much your definition of faith, and having faith, and then evidence; because as a child, you know, I would never understand missionaries who would stand up and allow their families to be [several unintelligible words] based on their faith in God that something was happening. And my question basically revolves around, when you use a faith that is based on evidence and you make a choice based on what you feel is evidence, and things don't work out, many evidence says that your choice is wrong.

Maxwell: Or you've misread the evidence; or you need more evidence.

Comment: Although you think that your evidence is quite concise, based on Biblical principles, be it, maybe, "Thou shalt not kill," how do you compromise Biblical evidence based on what's happening, based on your choices?

I think maybe a good example would be World War II when the Jews were being abused. And based on their evidence of Scriptures, they decided not to band together and fight back. An entire, you know, community was destroyed, based on their ability to try to be like Christ, to be more Godly. And, you know, what do you use. . .

Maxwell: Okay; I would want to settle my scale of values first. The most important thing I want to be convinced of, is the truth about God, the kind of Person He is. I may face many problems on other levels, but I want to be sure about that.

That's all Job had left. Everything else seemed to be contrary. And he had theologians who came and misinterpreted everything that was happening. They were wrong!

Up in Heaven, God is saying, "Look at them telling him there's evil in his home; and he should come closer to God and confess his sin." Upstairs, God is saying, "There's a perfect and an upright man who is always faithful in his home." The theologians were wrong. But it puzzled Job, you know. And he went through great agony. But he said, "One thing sure; I'm sure about You." He said, "I would trust You even if You slew Me; I would trust You."

In that order, if that's settled, then you face other problems along the way. And we add up evidence the best we can. But we may change our minds as evidence comes in.

Like you read, I placed faith in God and in His Word. And His Word says, "Take the tithe and buy strong drink with it, and rejoice before the Lord."

You say, "Well, if You said it, I believe it, and I'm on my way, tomorrow night, to do it."

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Then you think, "Well, I think I should check that out a little better." And you research it more, and compare many other passages in Scripture; and come to a clearer understanding. And God's advice there makes perfectly good sense.

He was helping them kill; He really didn't want them to. He gave them a king, and didn't want them to have a king. He gave them the food of Egypt; and then gave them advice so they wouldn't get too sick when they ate it. Because He didn't want them to eat it at all.

And bit by bit, the evidence adds up through the years; in which case, our trust should increase as the evidence accumulates. And you see this marvelous mosaic of evidence fitting together, tested by experience and all these other ways.

But it might mean that through the years you might change on some points. But you're always willing to listen. You trust God enough to be willing to listen. If that isn't established, nothing else matters too much.

So when disasters come, we often speculate as to the meaning, and come up with various answers, you know. Families on the way to campmeeting, and they have an accident. This has happened several times that I know of.

And some will say, "Well, there must have been an Achan in the camp, as it were. There must have been some member in that family who hadn't paid his tithe, or what have you."

This is what the friends of Job said, you know; "you must have done something terribly wrong." Though the Bible says he hadn't. So it was a wrong interpretation.

So when we hear explanations, we should always take them back to the source of the original evidence about God. The same source will help us bring all the pieces together. And then unfortunately, just when we have it nicely put together, we are too old in this life. We'll have to carry that faith into the hereafter. What is it? "Too soon old, too late smart." I mean, that's what happens.

What's sad though, is to see people get older, and their faith unravels. It's better as we get older, our faith comes together. I think there's nothing more wonderful than to see an elderly person. And there have been many disappointments. And health is gone, maybe. And they still really trust God; because the thing has matured. That would be desirable.

It sometimes goes the other way. And you can see an old person who is very disillusioned about it all. The faith they once had is now gone.

But I think if the inquiry that led us to want to look at the evidence in the first place, is pursued - and part of the truth is, you must keep pursuing; please do. Learn more — then when we are at our oldest, we will be our most secure.

And that would mean, though I haven't faced this yet, I don't know what I'm going to do. Make no promises. It should be possible to die and say, "I won't be scared."

Venden: Amen! Well, what a blessed evening. And we hope that you will be able to make it next Friday night. And have a good Sabbath.

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Maxwell: I'll have to think about some of these questions that were asked.

Venden: Yes. Would you again ask God's blessing as we part?

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven, What a pleasure to meet and speak of Thee. We all share faith in Thee, or we wouldn't be here. We all desire to know Thee better. And we do know if we take Thy word seriously, all the weight of evidence, that someday we shall all see Thee face to face.

And when we do see Thee, if we have been able to accept the revelation all through Scripture, we know there will be no need to be afraid. And even though there will be much for us yet to learn - maybe we still need much correction - we know that if we come to the end of this life trusting Thee, we will begin the next one still trusting Thee, and still willing to listen.

May at least tonight there be within us this humble willingness to stand in Thy Presence and ask, "What do we need to know? What needs to be corrected? What must we do to be well, to be saved?"

And may we not be cheating when we ask that. May we really mean it. Because we know that as our Creator, our Father, our Heavenly Physician, Thou dost not only want to heal us and save us, but Thou art well able to do so, if only we will trust Thee.

So we do once again restate our trust in Thee.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, Questions #3

Dr. Louis Venden with Dr. A. Graham Maxwell

Venden: You know, Graham, I am very grateful that that last statement you made about faith—such a beautiful definition—is right here on our Bible Reference sheet. Because I didn't have time to copy it down, and here it is that I can refer to and cherish. We have had several people ask a question that I would like for you to comment on. They have written this question out and they've asked me personally, Why don't you begin the meeting with a formal prayer?

Maxwell: Because we started with a lot of prayer elsewhere just before we came on.

Venden: But apparently there are some who are wondering.

Maxwell: I like the thought behind that, because only a saint would raise that question in the first place. But we talked about this a great deal. Just as sitting down is saying something—that I believe God would want us to be comfortable as Jesus did, and He would converse with us. Likewise, that fact that we didn't start with formal prayer. We wouldn't want prayer just to suggest that now it's time to begin the meeting, and in sixty minutes we'll do it again and then you will know when to go home. Because unfortunately, prayer can deteriorate into that. Sometimes it is almost a signal to the choir to begin the final response.

See, conversation about God can be prayerful all the way through, and we want the conversation to be that special. And if God were here, I would want Him to speak first, that's for sure. And that is why we have all the texts of Scripture. We want Him to be speaking. I wish He could speak more of the time. And so conversation about God with the Scriptures before us can be conversations with God. And you know that familiar saying, "Prayer is conversation with God as with a friend." But I'd like the one who raised the question to know, we hope you will pray because we are too all the way through.

Venden: And I hear you saying that in a very real sense, the whole thing is in the atmosphere of prayer. We are looking to God's Word here and our questions and our dialogue here is our response and a shared response.

You have said a great deal about trust this evening. I'm wondering when—I can hear a person saying something like this: When are we going to get on to the really important ideas of Justification and Sanctification, Expiation, Propitiation, Atonement, Substitution and so forth. Haven't you spent long enough on trust?

Maxwell: I think we had been talking about justification, but we've given it another name. We'll even use those names, because they are an important part of our history. And when we talk to our friends for whom those are the words, then we should use them, if we are going to communicate at all.

But I'd rather use the words the Bible uses. And some would say,

"Well, aren't those the words the Bible uses?"

No! It's going to be interesting to arrive in the Kingdom and settle all debates by going up to Paul and say,

"Give us the last word, Paul. What did you mean by justification?"

"Could I hear that one more time?" he'll say.

"Yes, justification—you know, your favorite word."

"Well, I never used it."

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"Well, how about sanctification?"

"No."

"Propitiation?"

"You mean you used none of those terms?"

"Expiation?"

Paul never used one of them. Neither did Jesus or anybody else in the Bible. You see, they are largely Latin words that came from a period when Latin was largely used for theology. A good many of the words, a good share of the words, the heavier words have Latin derivation. Some come from Greek. We'll look at "sola Scriptura." That's pure Latin. And no one studies Latin these days, by and large. Why do we keep using it? Why not "the Bible only?" Or the word that I used previously, the "Christomonistic principle." That's Greek. I think, by the way, I slipped and said it was Latin one time. That's Greek. "Christos"—Christ and "monos"—only. Why not say the "Christ alone" principle? So I would rather use simple terms as we go through, but having discussed the whole plan of salvation and its transforming experience, we will sprinkle these terms through if you like, so you can see where they fit. But Jesus described the whole truth about His Father and how we could be saved without ever using one of those words.

Venden: I wonder if the words become a sort of shorthand, but the danger of that is we think we understand what we are talking about when we may have loaded the word with meaning that really isn't fair to the Scripture.

Maxwell: That's the hazard, it's well to go back to the beginning, and we'll try to do that.

Venden: All right. Let's move along to another question that has come in here. You've talked about faith meaning trust rather than just "knowing" something. Aren't there some things that we could say, legitimately, we only know by faith, such as that statement in Hebrews 11:3, "by faith we know that the world was made," and so forth?

Maxwell: I would want to reply, "By faith in what?"

Venden: All right.

Maxwell: What do you mean, you just know something by faith? Do you have a feeling of conviction inside perhaps?

Venden: Well, what about the Hebrews passage here?

Maxwell: Where it says there we know by faith, what would the writer mean? Faith in something, to be sure.

Venden: Don't keep me waiting...

Maxwell: How do we know anything about where the world came from? We have to read it in the Scripture, don't we? So we read the record. So by faith in the Scriptures we believe that God created the world as recorded. That leaves another question. Can the Bible be trusted? You see. So when we say we know these things by faith and they are things described in Scripture, we are not saying, "I know this because I have a warm feeling down in my heart." That could be from indigestion. So when you say, "I know something by faith," I would want to know what the faith is in, and in this case, in Hebrews 11, it is faith in the Bible. So we had a whole evening on this. Can the Bible really be trusted? I mean, in the most critical company, can you say, "I have found the Bible to be utterly

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reliable from cover to cover?" I believe you can, and so we have one evening on "The Record of The Evidence."

Venden: That ties in—talking about the Bible and trusting the Bible—What do you say to a person who says, "Look, I just want to take the Bible as it reads? And when I read in the Bible that as, for example, in Romans 11:33 in that doxology that Paul concludes there with, 'God's ways are inscrutable.' How can anyone know the mind of God? Now, if I just accept the Bible, why can't I just accept that statement and say, 'Well, you know, why have conversations about God? How can we even know God?'" I'll just believe the Bible.

Maxwell: Now, depending on the person who is saying this, one might reply differently, but let's assume this is a very devout person. He really does accept the Scriptures. I would want to make the most of that. I would want to say, "Well, what about these other places in the Bible? Do you accept those too?"

Venden: What other places?

Maxwell: Or do you just accept this one? Like places that say God can be known in Romans 1:18-21. In fact, this individual is accepting one verse in Romans and skipping another one. If that doesn't work, then I might turn to Proverbs 31:6,7 that says, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery," and verses like that, until maybe he is shocked into realizing you can't take "here a little and there a little." When you say you accept the Bible, you must accept it all the way through? And probably that's what he meant when he said, "I accept God's word. If it says it, I believe it, and that's all there is to it." Then I would want to point to these other verses that say that God can be known, and if He can't be known, why all this content of Scripture? Why did Christ come to make His Father known? So this use of one little verse can lead down all kinds of pathways I'm sure he wouldn't want to go.

Venden: So you are saying that the basic attitude of, "I want to accept the Bible as it reads," is good, provided it takes the Bible as a whole, all sixty-six books, the total message of Scripture.

Maxwell: Right.

Venden: In our Bible reference sheet here, reference is made there in the passage regarding Abraham, and James answers to that. Now, here's Abraham referred to as a man of faith. Couldn't you call that blind faith, when Abraham set out to obey God, when God said, "Take your son; I want you to bring him and to offer him as a sacrifice?" (Genesis 22:2)

Maxwell: Well, you know, this is very similar to the example you just gave. We were not there at Creation to see. We do have confidence in the Biblical record because it has proved in so many other ways to be trustworthy. Abraham's relationship with God. Why, they were two of the best friends in all history. Abraham knew God well. He had had long experience with God. When God had asked him to do things before, it had always worked out well, and it made sense. So there was no blind faith on Abraham's part. God asked him to do something that puzzled him a great deal. At the moment, he couldn't understand, but he said, "God, if it is You saying it, and I know You so well, I know this will make sense and there will be some solution, so I'm on my way." This kind of faith is saying, "God, I'm on my way, but may I ask You why?" And so on the way, he asked why. And as he thought it through, he thought, the One who gave me this son miraculously is well able to resurrect my son. Or maybe He will provide a substitute. And Hebrews 11:19 says he was right. So instead of that being blind faith, I would say he knew God well enough to go and know that there would be a solution that would make sense. And so it did.

Venden: But there was in that experience an element of uncertainty. That is to say, How will it work out? There was pain. Certainly.

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Maxwell: He wondered.

Venden: Yes, all right. So faith can include that kind of thing.

Maxwell: Because God is so trustworthy, we are willing to obey Him when He asks us to do something beyond our present understanding.

Venden: All right. Now, in this use of James, I want to come back to that one again here, you have said that faith—or James is saying that, I guess I shouldn't say that you said it—that faith alone is not enough. Does that mean that we also have to have works? And isn't that getting back on dangerous ground?

Maxwell: Well that's this same matter of understanding what the works are. The word for obedience, as I mentioned, is a "willingness to listen." God does not expect perfect performance. I have just gone to my physician with an advanced case of arthritis, and he would not ask me to run the four-minute mile on the way home. He even helps me down the steps into my wheelchair, maybe. He says, "Do a little better this week, and be sure to come back and take your medication." Now, what he asks of me is a "willingness to listen and cooperate." And I might die the next day, but I'm going to die his trusting patient. And I will arise his trusting patient and all will be well.

So the performance God desires of us is the "willingness to listen." He knows we are too weak to do it perfectly. And I think we have set a goal for us that is really—well, it would make our God most unsympathetic. But to picture Him as our Physician is the best model we could have. God knows our weaknesses. He wants us someday to be perfect; not just spiritually, but physically, mentally, socially. All those things. But He knows it is going to take a little time. What He wants right now up front is a sincere willingness to listen and stop cheating. Then the healing is guaranteed. I mean God has the ability to perfectly restore every one of His children. No question. He has never lost a patient, except the patients who are unwilling to listen. So to know that obedience means primarily a willingness to listen, is the thing.

Venden: And James gives us a picture of what happens in our lives when we are willing to listen.

Maxwell: Oh, when we are willing to listen, we begin to behave like God—more and more like Him.

Venden: Trust sounds like something we have to do. It might sound that way. But doesn't God do it all? Isn't faith—what we've talked about this evening—isn't that faith itself the gift of God?

Maxwell: It's so described in the Bible. Faith is a gift of God. (1 Corinthians 12:9) This is so important that it is much of the subject next week: God's Way of Restoring Trust. Well, He gives everything except one thing, I believe. He gives us life. He gives us minds to weigh the evidence. He gives us the evidence. He gives us the freedom. He gives us everything, except He does not cast the vote. If in this great controversy, in this war, God would also manipulate us so we would vote the way He wanted, you know who would cry foul. So God does not win this great controversy by stuffing His own ballot box, by also putting the faith within us. Then you have the question, "Why does He put faith in some and not in others?" And then there's no responsibility. You say, "I don't have faith. You know why? God didn't give me any." And you know what that has led to in theological history. God gives us everything, but He doesn't cast the vote. That's up to us. That is what freedom is. That's where responsibility is. And I like it this way. It's a little scary. But would you want it any other way?

Venden: Am I right that this ties in a bit with what you will be talking about next time—how God goes about doing this?

Maxwell: Oh, yes. Very crucial. If He used any other method, I wouldn't trust Him.

Venden: This question has come up, and I noticed too, that as I looked over the Bible reference

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sheet you used, I think six or seven different translations. How do you decide what translation to use? Are you just picking out the one that says it the way that you want it?

Maxwell: That's a very fair question. When I am through choosing these, I have versions all over the table and the floor, because I have more than a hundred fifty different English translations.

Venden: Do you check them all?

Maxwell: I check many of them—until I find what I want? That's right, but what do I want? In all fairness, I do go back to the original. I have taught Biblical languages for years, the Hebrew, the Greek and the Aramaic, and so I check with the original. What I want is a version that will be as neutral as possible. Like last week. "God sent His Son," some versions say "as a sacrifice for sin," or "to atone for sin." That's very interpretive. The Greek just says "He sent His Son concerning sin." So I put two versions in, "He sent His Son to deal with sin." That's beautifully neutral. Now I can decide how He dealt with it. Or "He sent His Son to do away with sin." So if I can't find one that is neutral, then I will put in several to show the possible meanings. And on that evening when we discuss the Bible, we'll go into that in more detail.

Venden: All right. What if I only have one. Now you say you have a hundred and fifty. I have maybe twenty or thirty. I don't think my wife is going to let me buy the rest to catch up with you.

Maxwell: Well unless you have one of the extraordinary ones I'll bring next time, like the New Testament Revised by the Spirits, or the New Testament Translated From Numerology or Metaphysics, if you have one of the mainline versions, they are all very trustworthy, if you read the Bible as a whole. If you make everything depend on one verse, even the comma might be in the wrong place. So put many passages together. There is safety always in reading the Bible as a whole. Then almost every version is dependable.

Venden: All right, I want to move to some other questions that have come up that will help us to draw on earlier meetings as well. Someone in our congregation would like to know what is the meaning of the statement, and you have used it, "You must be born again." (John 3:4,9) That is a familiar question.

Maxwell: Yes, and President Carter made that a popular one.

Venden: It's a popular phrase, isn't it? I'm a born-again Christian. What does that mean?

Maxwell: Nicodemus even asked what it meant, and Jesus said, "That should be pretty clear, if you've read the fifty-first Psalm and other places." To be changed from a rebel to someone who can be trusted. To be changed from a stubborn person who is unwilling to listen to someone who loves, trusts and admires God and doesn't want to miss a single word. That's like being born all over again. And that's why Jesus used such a dramatic picture.

Now, that's also the meaning of being converted. You know, you turn around and go the other way like a convertible changes its top on a car. So to be converted means turn around and go the other way. Now I'm stubborn and rebellious. Now I'm humbly willing to listen, love, trust and admire. And one picture is being born again. I think that Jesus was chiding Nicodemus for being a little slow to pick up something that he should have know.

Venden: He should have known by experience.

Maxwell: I think so. I think so.

Venden: Another individual has written this question. Do you see the world as a predominantly evil place? If so, how can God's plan be vindicated—if evil seems to triumph over good? And this individual says, I believe that good must triumph over evil without divine intervention before Christ

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can come again. What do you . . .

Maxwell: Yes. The most important words would be "without divine intervention." If God had not intervened, we would be in a helpless situation, because in this conflict we have an adversary who is intervening all he can, and manipulating, and deceiving and beclouding the intellect. If God had not intervened, we would be in trouble. But if that is suggesting truth will triumph without God manipulating things? Yes. Absolutely. My understanding is that God intervenes in order that truth may be seen clearly, so that truth may have a chance to win. God will not win because He has intervened with power and force and manipulation. That's the devil's method. God will win, in a certain sense, without intervention. But He is very much involved in order to protect us from the adversary and give the truth a chance to be seen. God will win because the truth is seen to be truth and we'll agree.

Venden: Let's see if we can cover a couple more here before our time is up. If it is true that the plan of salvation and the death of Christ was needed to confirm the faith of the unfallen angels, would it not seem that God needed a place like this earth to send His Son to die in order to answer Satan's charges?

Maxwell: One thing that comes to mind is, must a parent die under the wheels of a truck, pushing his little child out of the way on his tricycle to prove that he loves the child? Now that would be very dramatic. God doesn't need this emergency to show that He loves His children and is worthy of their trust. But when the emergency arose, look how He has behaved. Look at the way He has handled it. So God is seen to be even more clearly trustworthy. He is no more trustworthy. He is just seen more clearly in the emergency. So once again, He has taken advantage of an emergency, it is very gracious of Him...

Venden: And made something positive out of it.

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: Though His heart breaks at the emergency.

Maxwell: Yes. That's right.

Venden: Here's someone who would like to know more about what you referred to last week—Martin Luther and his problems with Hebrews and James and Jude and Revelation. Could you give us some actual references? This person would like to know where they could go for themselves. They believe what you said because they trust you, but they would like to have a reference.

Maxwell: Fair enough. I hope they have enough evidence. Well, knowing that this question was coming up, I brought one of the volumes along. Those prefaces that I read from are to be found in a series by Jaroslav Pelican—I knew him at the University of Chicago—entitled Luther's Works. I read from Volume Thirty-five last time, where Luther says there is no way the Holy Spirit could have inspired the book of Revelation. And since I have quoted James this evening, you know that Luther says the book of James is totally contrary to Saint Paul.

But now, lest we put Luther in an unfair light, you should read the prefaces. With what reverence he spoke of Scripture. He says, James is a wonderful book, and I like the way it upholds God's law. See, that should balance it out. Our only question was, was he able to see the larger great controversy view. There are even glimpses of that. If you take the first volume here, on Genesis, he says, "The holy fathers have fancied that there once was this war up in Heaven." He said, "That is a likely idea. It fits in with the statement in Jude that angels fell, and so on." And he said, "You know, it is true that the angels apparently were once able to sin, because some of them fell." But he said, "The loyal angels were concerned so that they are no longer capable of sinning." I mean, he was

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working with it. And I would rather pay respect to Luther. I believe he was catching glimpses of the larger view, but he never followed it through.

Venden: He had a bit of a glimpse.

Maxwell: He did.

Venden: Well, now our time has come when we must talk a bit about next Friday night's meeting. What is coming Friday night? What is the topic?

Maxwell: God's way of restoring trust. And I believe the methods that He has used—not claims, not show of power, but evidence—are the greatest reasons for trusting Him.

Venden: You've talked this evening about the importance of trust. So we move on, and how God proceeds to lead us through that experience. And as we continue these Conversations about God, what a joy and what a privilege to talk together about such a wonderful Heavenly Father.

Maxwell: Agreed.

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