

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER FOUR

GOD'S WAY OF RESTORING TRUST

by A. Graham Maxwell Copyright 1984

Number Four: **God's Way Of Restoring Trust**--another look at the only safe basis for faith, in the larger setting of the conflict over God's character and government.

To have peace once again in His universe, all God asks of us is trust. But He does not expect us to trust Him as a stranger. Besides, He has been charged with being unworthy of our faith. How has God answered such false accusations? Mere claims of trustworthiness prove nothing. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances--especially difficult ones--can trust be re-established and confirmed. The Bible is a record of just such a demonstration. This is God's way of restoring trust.

Welcome to the fourth of our conversations about God--another look at our heavenly Father in the larger setting of the universe-wide great controversy over His character and government. Following our discussion right where we left off last time, to have peace once again in His universe all God asks of us is trust. And there will be peace again, just as there was before the war that began up in heaven described in Rev. 12. There will be peace once again because all the members of God's vast family will trust each other, and all of them will trust in their heavenly Father and He in turn can safely trust in them. Wherever there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, and perfect security.

But our heavenly Father has been accused of being unworthy of the faith and trust of His children. He has even been accused of being a liar--of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. In His far-sighted plan it might seem incredible to us that the Infinite One would permit this. But in His wisdom and foreknowledge, He has allowed these accusations and charges to spread throughout the universe--even including our planet. It has led even to the point of open rebellion, revolt and war. How do you think God will ever be able to restore trust in His universe--His family?

Or maybe we should say, how has He confirmed the trust of those who stayed loyal to Him? For, as far as they are concerned, the war has been over for 2000 years. So maybe we should ask, "How does He propose to win us untrusting children back to trust Him as the loyal angels already do?" Has He answered the charges and the accusations? And do we find His answers a sufficient basis for our faith?

I wish that God could handle this Himself. Imagine Him sitting in front of our group and someone having the courage to begin the inquiry.

"God, did You lie to us when You said that sin results in death?"

How do you think God would reply?

Might He say: "Absolutely not! You will die precisely as I said. Any more questions?"

"Well God--I want to speak reverently as Abraham did--Are you the least bit arbitrary?"

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"No!"

"Are you exacting?"

"Certainly not!"

"Are You vengeful?"

"No!"

"Are You unforgiving?"

"No!"

"Are You severe?"

"Certainly not! How dare you ask such questions?"

And at that moment, the floor might begin to move beneath our feet, and there would be thunder, and lightning, and fire, and a great cloud. And then God might say, "Any more questions?" I'm glad I know about the conversation Abraham had with Him when Abraham said, "Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" (Gen. 18:25) And God said to Abraham, "You really are My friend!" (James 2:23) Otherwise, I wouldn't know what to do with that conversation.

But suppose God were to do what I have just imagined. Would you be satisfied with the answers? If you were terrified, you might tell Him that you were! It would pay to, perhaps! But walking home tonight, would you really feel convinced? Can truth be established by a show of power? Satan tries this all the time. He has to, because the truth isn't with him, and in the absence of evidence He uses other methods. He loves to use great shows of power such as fire coming down from heaven (Rev. 13:13), and miracles and all sorts of other ways of seducing and intimidating us to mislead and deceive us.

But since the truth is with our Heavenly Father, He never has to stoop to using such methods. That is one reason, I believe, that He is not visibly here. Because if He were to be here, even in humble form as His Son was when He came, our tendency would be to say, "God, if You have said it, We believe it, and that is all there is to it!" (recognizing who He is, after all!) So even Jesus said, after just three and one-half years, "it is better that I go now" especially since they now recognized that He was God. Otherwise the disciples might stop thinking things through. They would simply run to Him and ask Him their questions, accepting His answers on the authority of who He was. It seems like the right thing to do.

Yet in the great controversy God does not ask for that. So even gentle Jesus said, "it is better that I go and I'll send the Holy Spirit who will come as a still small voice. He'll come to be a Teacher and a Guide to lead you into the truth. You won't see Him. He won't intimidate you. He only works with evidence. Most particularly He'll help you understand the Bible." For God does speak to us. He does answer our questions, but He does it through what we call His Word. We talk to God, and He talks to us as we study the scriptures. That is why I believe that really thoughtful study of the scriptures is a form of prayer. That is real conversing with God as with a

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friend. Now, some people pray a great deal, but never hear God speak back because they never spend much time reading the Bible.

But if one reads the Bible and then responds to God, there is conversation, as one thinks along, saying to God, "What I have just read is marvelous!"--that is conversation with God as with a Friend, which is the meaning of prayer. When we pick up the Bible, and have this kind of conversation with Him, what do we find there? With respect to the questions in the great controversy, do we find denials? Do we find claims? No, we find evidence.

Even when a person has been falsely accused, there is no way to establish the truth simply by denying the charges. If just denying the charges would have worked, think what God could have done way back in eternity. He could have assembled all of the angels, hundreds of millions of them, and He could have stood before them in all His authority and majesty. He could have said the following, "I want you to know that these charges are absolutely false. I can be trusted. I am not arbitrary. I have not lied to you, and I expect you to believe it. Remember who I am, and don't forget My power." And all the angels might have bowed their heads and said, "We agree."

But in a setting like that, how would you know if people really do agree? So God did not even try this. Even when a person has been falsely and unfairly accused of being untrustworthy--perhaps you have been so accused at some time--only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances, particularly difficult ones, can trustworthiness be re-established and confirmed. It is my understanding that the Sixty-six books of the Bible are the record of precisely such a demonstration--in every single book.

So we go to the Bible and we ask, "God, why didn't You take charge more vigorously and end the conflict? We would expect that of trustworthy leadership." I hear the answer coming back as I read through the Sixty-six--If the great controversy were over power, God could have settled it in a moment. But the great conflict is not over who has the most power. Even the Devil is prepared to concede that. Look at James 2:19 (remember what we have already said that belief, trust, faith, and confidence are all the same word in Greek, the original language of the New Testament) "Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe and they tremble with fear."

You see, they believe in God's existence, and that there is only one God. They even have great faith in His power and it scares them. Notice also the next verse, Rev. 12:12, as far as the Devil being convinced about God's power. "The Devil has come down to you and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left." That verse means that the Devil is an adventist! (one who believes in the soon return of Christ) It scares him! The Devil is terrified every time he thinks of Christ's soon coming. However, the Devil's kind of faith is not what God is looking for, but that is the kind of faith that a show of power usually produces. It is not enough.

A dramatic illustration of how the use of power can be misunderstood is found in Gen. 9 and 11. You remember that after the flood, "God said to Noah and his sons. . . I promise that never again will all living things be destroyed by a flood." Imagine what a demonstration of God's power that was. Did it win people? Was everyone so convinced by that display of power that no one ever distrusted God again? Well, He went on to say, "As a sign of this everlasting

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covenant that I am making with you and with all living things, I am putting my bow in the clouds.' "At first, the people of the whole world had only one language. . . They said to one another . . . ' Now let's build a city with a tower that reaches the sky.'" (Gen. 9:8, 11-13; 11:1,3,4 - GNB)

Now these inhabitants of Babel, did they believe in God? Did they believe in His power? Did they believe He had the power to drown the whole world in a flood? Did they believe His promise that He would never do it again? So they built the tower. They didn't build the tower because they didn't believe in God, but because they **did** believe in God and it scared them that He has so much power.

So perhaps we need not spend so much time discussing God's power, unless some don't believe that He has it. The great controversy is not over power, but over who is telling the truth. God has been accused of the abuse of power and of a failure to tell the truth. Such charges cannot be met by force. To resort to force would only worsen the matter --as if to suggest that I don't have evidence, so now I must intimidate you with power. So God chose the only way -- the long, painful, costly and apparently weak way, as some regard it -- of teaching, of explanation, of demonstration.

Finally, He sent His Son, and the way He treated people, the things He taught about His Father, and most particularly, the unique and awful way that He died was the clearest demonstration of the truth about God that the universe will ever see or ever need.

Sadly, though, religion often fails to use God's methods. Thus it is often religion that most seriously misrepresents our God. Instead, religion has through the centuries resorted to claims, pronouncements, and force, even persecution, and a great deal of pomp and power. These are methods that God does not use. Then how dare we mortals try them.

Even within Christianity it is so widely suggested that God expects us to trust Him without evidence and then calls that faith, for faith is believing without evidence. Christianity has often suggested that such blind faith is even a notable virtue. Then religion goes on to suggest that for God to use such methods i.e., to expect our faith and trust without evidence, just based on His claims and authority, is His perfect sovereign right! It should not therefore be regarded as arbitrary, for He can do whatever He wants to do. And that is the method He chooses. He expects us to trust Him without evidence and call that faith.

No! I would want to counter that by saying, I believe with all my heart that God **is** infinitely powerful. He **is** the Sovereign. And He **can** run His universe anyway He wishes and He **will**. This is very clear in Rom. 9. Like the potter, He can take a piece of clay and make anything out of it that He wishes. But as we open up the Sixty-six books and ask God, "How do You run Your universe?" we find precisely the opposite. We find Him warning us against believing mere claims. Look at Deut. 13: 1-3 (RSV) " If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, (it actually happens!) and if He says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the word of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams." (parentheses supplied) Never mind the miracle.

Then look at the extraordinary story told in 1 Kings 13. It's a whole chapter. It's so dramatic. It is the story of a younger prophet called the " man of God", who was told by God to deliver a message to the king, and not to accept hospitality, but to come home by another route.

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But as he was on his way home, an older prophet heard of what had happened. He asked his sons to saddle his donkey, you remember, and he got on it and chased after the man of God, until he caught up with him, as we read in 1 Kings 13:15-18 (RSV). "Then he (the older prophet) said to him, 'Come home with me and eat bread.' And he (the man of God) said, 'I may not return with you, or go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place; for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, "You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.'" And he said to him, 'I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, "Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him." And you remember that the younger prophet believed the older prophet, and he went home and ate with him and as he proceeded on his way he was met by a lion who slew him. If you don't know the story you ought to read it. It warns us that people who make claims that God has spoken through them may be lying to us. And it is God himself who warns us of that.

But the most impressive illustration of how God seeks to convince us, not on the basis of authority and power, but on the basis of truth, was provided by Jesus Himself on the road to Emmaus. It is described in Luke 24. We'll read from verses 15-17, 27, 30, 31 (RSV) "While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (They did not realize that Christ was there walking with them). "And he said to them 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?' (they were having a conversation about God as we are) And they stood still, looking sad. . . And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. . ." (Later) "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him."

Why did He not reveal who He was at the beginning, and say, "What are your questions? You know that I will give you authoritative answers, and I will expect you to believe them." He did not reveal who He was until He had led them to an intelligent confidence based on the unquestionable evidence of scripture. Then He revealed who He was. If the Infinite One will do that, how dare we presume to take any shortcuts!

But has not God often used a show of power? Consider the flood, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Carmel, the plagues of Egypt and a long list of other similar experiences that we could mention. Well, each time He does so, we need to inquire very closely, why? In Egypt, we understand why He showed His power. The ten plagues of Egypt demonstrated the impotence of those Egyptian gods. In those days, you determined the reverence with which you should hold a god by the condition of his worshipers. The Egyptians were in charge at that time and the Israelites were slaves. Obviously, the gods of the Egyptians were more powerful than the God of the Israelites. Even the Israelites had come to believe it. But each of the plagues demonstrated the impotence of yet another Egyptian deity. How could you revere a frog when you had been stamping on them all day and sweeping them up into stinking piles?

One by one the Egyptians got the message. They began to think that the God of the Israelites must be more powerful. Thus, some even decided to go out with them. Even the Israelites began to think that maybe their God was not so weak after all. Now that is very elementary. But if we don't believe God has power, He will reassure us if we really need it. That is really the easiest thing for him to do -- to show His power. And the devil admits it. Peter one time said in his letter (2 Pet. 3:4-6), "some of you think that the second coming is delayed

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because God doesn't have the power to do what He has promised. May I remind you," says Peter, "that He created the world in the beginning! He also drowned it in a flood." So don't think He is waiting because He is weak. It's too bad that God ever has to reassure us of His power. But if we need it, He will do it, and that will be very easy for Him. It is also highly dangerous! For every time that God uses His power, there is the hazard that we'll misunderstand. For God has been accused of the abuse of His superior power.

So does God expect us to trust Him as a powerful stranger - Someone whose power we fear, lest He abuse it? Is that the relationship that He wants? Paul, who wrote so much about faith in all his letters, especially in Romans, is very clear that God does not expect us to trust Him as a powerful stranger. Look at Rom. 10:11, 13-15, 17 (Living Bible) "For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes (or trusts, or has faith) in Christ will ever be disappointed. . . Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? . . . How welcome are those who come preaching God's Good News! . . . Faith comes from listening to this Good News" (they didn't have personal copies, so it was listening in those days, whereas today we might say reading or learning this Good News) -"the Good News about Christ." (parenthesis supplied).

Now where shall we find this Good News if not in the Biblical record? But how does one read the Bible in order to learn the truth about God? To find the answers to our questions and whether or not He is worthy of our trust? Should we go through the book and collect statements - sometimes known as key texts? We don't want to make light of key texts. Oh that we knew 5000 more! But key texts (statements) are claims. And God does not ask us to believe mere claims. God is love. God is this. God is that. Such statements are claims. Where is the evidence? The evidence is in between the key texts. The evidence is in the stories. And we adults do a very strange thing. We collect the claims and give the evidence to the children, and hope they fully understand how Samson, filled with the Holy Spirit, could kill a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass! We may not know what that is supposed to mean, but we hope the dear little children will be able to understand it clearly!

Children are willing to accept statements and claims. "My daddy says so, and I believe it." As adults we demand evidence. As the children grow up they become more demanding of evidence. Why do we give the evidence to the children while we collect the claims? Give the claims to the children, and let us take the stories back. It is time that we read the stories that the children spend so much time telling to each other after hearing them in grade school or sabbath school.

The stories are the demonstration of the truth about our God. The key texts are the summaries of the meaning. They really are more like claims. So to know God better and determine whether he is worthy of our trust - which is our privilege in the great controversy - I believe that, as adults, we have to read all Sixty-six books and ask of every story, teaching, and event, what does this tell me about my God? As I mentioned earlier, I have had the privilege of doing this more than 100 times with different groups. It takes a year each trip. One book a week.

So, on the authority of the Sixty-six books, I am prepared to say in any company that I believe that **God is an infinitely powerful (no question about it) but equally gracious Person Who values nothing higher than the freedom, the dignity, and the individuality of His**

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intelligent creatures, that their love, their faith, their worship, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. And I believe that that is supported by a very great weight of evidence, i.e. demonstration.

Of course, some may say, "that sounds like too much work, and I just don't have the time. Besides, isn't faith a gift of God anyway? I prefer that shortcut. Isn't it just the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart? Couldn't I go to bed not trusting God, and end my prayer by saying, 'Lord, please give me faith' and then wake up in the morning trusting Him with all my heart?" It doesn't make any sense when we say it that way does it? There is no shortcut to faith!

Faith is indeed a gift of God. Look at Gal. 5:22 (KJV) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith . . ." There is no contradiction in what we are suggesting, because how does the Holy Spirit work? How does He lead us to trust in God? Well, look at 2 Pet. 1:20,21 (NEB) "But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself. For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled (a very strong word) by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God." (parenthesis supplied).

Look at another translation of the same verses, to show the variation but essentially same meaning. (2 Pet. 1:20,21 Goodspeed) "You must understand this in the first place, that no prophecy in Scripture can be understood through one's own powers, for no prophecy ever originated in the human will, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit men spoke for God." And the meaning of the word prophet is, someone who speaks for God. A prophet is not just a predictor of the future, but those who speak for God are prophets. They couldn't do it if the Holy Spirit weren't working with them.

Notice Jesus' own explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16,17,25,26; 15:26; 16:12 (GNB) "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,(the KJV has Comforter, but it is much more than a Comforter, or Counsellor. It is even the word translated Advocate in some places) who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. . . The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you. . . The Helper will come - the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. . . When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth." (parentheses supplied)

Will you notice that they are all involved in the same work. Look at Jn. 5:39 (GNB) as to the purpose of scripture. "You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!" You see, Christ came to reveal the truth about God. The Holy Spirit comes for the same purpose. The record of Christ's revelation is in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the one who moved some of our fellow believers to write the record. Then the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the record. Rom. 8 even tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us to pray as we read.

So if we desire to know God, and learn the answers to the questions in the great controversy; if we want to see Christ; if we want to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit; if we want to let Him lead us into truth; there is only one way, and that way is to read the Bible. As we read all Sixty-six books we will discover how true the statement is in Heb. 1:1 (RSV) "In many (very many) and various (very various) ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets. . ."

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You see that is demonstrating in many and various ways over a long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances - that is what Heb. 1:1 is saying - "in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son (or by his Son)" (parentheses supplied) You don't find claims in there. You find demonstration - over many centuries of time and certainly under a great variety of circumstances. The very length of the Sixty-six books speaks well of our God. The very existence of the Bible says that God is not trying to lead us to trust Him without evidence.

If God offered us only claims, the Bible would only need to be a paragraph long. How moving it is to us to realize that the infinite One has chosen to win His family by being a humble teacher - by stooping to meet us where we are, speaking a language we can understand, leading us no faster than we are able to follow and running grave risks of being misunderstood, especially when we are so noisy that He has to raise His voice to get our attention - and then tell us that He does not like to raise His voice at all. A teacher like that could be trusted.

Of course all of this assumes that the Bible itself can be trusted. And there are legitimate questions one can raise about this book. Do we have the right collection of Sixty-six books? Have the words of those books been accurately preserved? Have those words been adequately translated into all the versions that we are confronted with? And most of all, can we be confident that we know the meaning?

In our next conversation, we will look at those questions briefly. I have spent some forty years concentrating on that subject, trying to equip myself to use all the tools for determining whether the Bible can be trusted and whether we can confidently understand the meaning. For myself, all I can say is that I am absolutely convinced. But don't believe it because I say so. Not even God expects us to do that! I can only bear my testimony. I believe that God can indeed be trusted. I don't just mean in some general way. I mean He can be trusted specifically in those areas where He has been accused. He can be trusted never to be arbitrary, or vengeful, or exacting, or unforgiving, or severe. But He doesn't expect us to come to that conclusion without evidence. Even His existence, His character, and the truthfulness of His word are all established by a great amount of evidence - and it is evidence that appeals to our reason.

Now this is God's way of restoring trust, and a God like that surely can be trusted!

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, Part B

Elder Louis Venden with Dr. A. Graham Maxwell

Venden: The evidence is in the stories. That's an interesting way to look at the Good Book.

Maxwell: That's why as a child, I used to read the stories, you know. You say, "Well, why read Samson anymore?" Well, most adults I meet don't know what to do with Samson, yet we hope the children do.

Venden: That's a further indication that we have things turned around. Another statement that you made, Graham, "There is no shortcut to see." This stuff is very important. We have been more than gratified by the response of so many of you with questions, that * some of these questions range back over things that we have already talked about, and some reach ahead. So we don't have time, and it isn't appropriate to cover every one of them every time.

Maxwell: But we won't ignore them.

Venden: That's one other point. Right. All right. You have talked about trust and faith, and again alluded to this, but I don't think many of us, Graham, still have that feeling that faith involves this kind of blind trust. You need faith when you don't have enough evidence, and so you just go ahead and believe. I wish you would comment a bit more about that. We need to get that nailed down.

Maxwell: Well, I wonder who has given that idea such circulation. It seems to me that only the adversary would be pleased with that. But when we trust God, we say, "I trust You, but I really don't have any evidence for doing so." That's what he would like to think. We say, "God, there is so much evidence, I am still studying it. The more I come to know You, the more I trust You." One thing that has caused trouble is the use of these different words. "Trust" is one thing. "Confidence" is one thing. "Faith" is another. They are all the same word in the Bible.

Venden: But still, some very sincere people have talked about faith as a leap in the dark. You go as far as you can on evidence, and then when you come to that cliff, you just close your eyes and jump and hope that you land.

Maxwell: Yes. That's the trouble, I think. History is strewn with the wreckage of those who have been leaping in the dark. You might make it, but it's a very dangerous thing to do. Now, it might be that God has asked me to do something like Abraham which I cannot momentarily cannot understand, but because of all the light in full confidence in One I know very well, I am willing to move forward. I even know Him well enough, that He won't be angry if I question Him along the way. Ah, I hate to call that a leap in the dark. Many use this definition because they really think they are in the dark. I mean, some most distinguished theologians whose presentations are so admirable, nevertheless believe that God has never really revealed these matters to us, and we are in the dark. I admire them for taking life so seriously in the dark. But I'm not going to say my faith in God is a leap in the dark! Christ came as the Light, and I say to God, "I trust You, but I'm surely in the dark." Why do you believe he is in the dark all the time? So often it has been they don't know what to do with the Bible. They don't really believe in a personal God who has really revealed Himself. So in a way, it's this old-fashioned confidence in Scripture that leads us to reject that definition, I think.

Venden: A loss of that confidence.

Maxwell: Yes, you see. But because we have it, we would never say we are in the dark. Look what He has paid to keep us in the light! For faith is the most enlightened, intelligent, rational

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decision we ever make for which we have the most evidence. I mean, I would hesitate to say this, but I have more evidence for trust in God than even you my friend. That's true, isn't it?

Venden: I think that's true.

Maxwell: You know.

Venden: * this question has come up regarding Deuteronomy 13 in the Bible reference sheet. It refers to warning against signs and wonders, and yet when we look in the gospels and the story of Jesus, aren't these miracles that He performed, aren't they a basis for belief?

Maxwell: * says this beginning of signs that He did, and it did say something, to be sure. His mother already trusted Him. She said, "Do whatever He says." I think the miracles do get people started sometimes, but it's not best evidence. Miracles can be counterfeited. Look at the first three plagues in Egypt. A miracle is the poorest kind of evidence, but if we are susceptible to it, our God will run the risk sometimes of using them. Like Gideon's wet fleece and then the dry one. That doesn't speak well of Gideon. It speaks very well of God. He generously gave him those signs. God would rather that we weigh the evidence. So I wouldn't want to say He didn't use miracles at all, but they are a most introductory step in developing faith, and it's a rather hazardous one.

Venden: And the Deuteronomy 13 passages point out the hazard there.

Maxwell: Yes. Because if at the same time they are performing miracles, they are not telling the truth --I am afraid that I watch some programs on the air where there is so much miracle and faith healing, I then listen to hear what they are saying about God. And if they are not telling the truth about God, then never mind those miracles. But I notice the audience is being so swayed by the miracles. They are so excited, they are not prepared to open their Bibles and do some hard study for truth. That is the danger of miracle. It is so dramatic.

Venden: You talked about faith as a gift. I remember that man who said to Jesus, when he was worried about his boy, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." What does God do in a situation like that to help unbelief?

Maxwell: Yes, I have thought about his cry. But this is just what he spontaneously said. He obviously did believe, or the one * wouldn't have been happening that was. He did believe. He just wished he had more faith. Now whether the man understood how God would increase his faith, it doesn't say. You have to look through the rest of Scripture to see that. And my understanding would be that God indeed can strengthen faith by offering evidence, by helping us to think about it, by protecting us from adversary who would becloud our minds and deprive us of our freedom to weigh the evidence. The Holy Spirit even moves. I don't mind the Holy Spirit impressing me. It's just when I feel an impression, I want to make sure it is the Holy Spirit and not what I had for supper. I think a lot of folk feel impressed about something, and it's something else. So God in many and various ways would work. Now maybe the man wanted a miracle at the moment. There is no mention that it happened. He already trusted God enough for this to happen. Jesus said, "You already. . ."

Venden: I hear you saying that God doesn't give us an injection of faith, or pop a pill in our mouths, but it is a process that involves our thinking and our understanding.

Maxwell: We want shortcuts. I think that's the appeal of the tree, when Eve was told, "Eat this fruit, and you will be like God." And she said, "I thought sanctification was the work of a lifetime, and you can do it with one bite?" Well, the sawdust trail approach. Go down to the front and you will be saved. You know, we are always wanting shortcuts, busy people that we are. Instant

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Venden: When you say "created in the mind of Lucifer," you don't mean God created it.

Maxwell: No. He did it himself. We are capable of that. Now there is a good thing in there. God has actually created us capable of thinking things up like that, but they don't have to be good. They can be bad. What a risk He ran to make us like Himself, to make us free. So evidently, freedom is everything to God. How could I say, "Take some back, please."

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Maxwell: I'll try. Do we have two hours? How much time do we have?

Venden: People want to know about perfection.

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Venden: I remember as a child, praying every evening and asking God to forgive me for all my sins and mistakes.

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Venden: That's right; maybe a little easier to forgive. If God is waiting for us to grow up in Him, * wait forever, because there are always people being converted. Is that why time goes on? When are we going to grow up?

Maxwell: That's true. There will be conversions right along, and we wonder how one could grow up in childhood to this maturity that we talked about. If God is not going to allow the closing events to occur until He has a generation like Job, mature enough and settled into the truth, to pass through the time of trouble, thoughts through my mind in that connection are this: I think we have assumed it takes a very, very long time to grow up from rebirth to maturity. I notice that when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he suggested that they could be grown up much sooner. And in Hebrews, it was just a few years later that he said, "By now you should be teachers, but you are still babes in the truth." I think that we could encourage people to believe they could grow up from rebirth to maturity much sooner, and it would be much more exciting. You know, we think, "I've launched myself on sixty-five years of slow sanctification." I think, "No, why not grow up without delay as quickly as possible and be settled into the truth?" But then when we have an absolutely out-of-sight, forbidding conception of perfection, we are not going to make it anyway. The conception of perfection we find in the Bible is the conception of an individual who is so convinced of this truth about God, that if Satan should come as an angel of light, even as Christ, and say God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving and severe, a twelve year-

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Venden: It strikes me that with the idea of growth, we tend too easily to think of performance. When you have the issues clearly in mind, growth is in terms of trust. And that would happen very quickly if you are willing. It's that and the evidence to look right.*

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: We are going to have to hurry here, but we are going to have to pass by some gems. But here is one that I think would be an appropriate concluding question this evening: Was the thief's trust developed only by the scene and words and circumstances around the cross, or was that trust developed through the thief's life of searching and being trusting as he was taught by the Holy Spirit during his whole life experience? What about the thief?

Maxwell: Oh, I like what that implies. We don't know how much the thief knew about Christ, but he surely must have known what was going on. But on the authority of the rest of Scripture, you know the Holy Spirit was working on that man. Christ is the Light which enlightens everyone who comes into the world. It's just that when he was hanging on the cross, here was evidence, brilliant evidence, and the Holy Spirit had a man cursing and swearing, but some tenderness inside and willingness to listen. And that thief was susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit who pointed his attention to the face of the One who was in the middle. His voice when He said, "Look after Mother," His compassion when He said, "Forgive." And that's what won him.

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, #4 Questions

Elder Louis Venden with Dr. A. Graham Maxwell

Venden: The evidence is in the stories. That's an interesting way to look at the Good Book.

Maxwell: That's why as a child, I used to read the stories, you know. You say, "Well, why read Samson anymore?" Well, most adults I meet don't know what to do with Samson, yet we hope the children do.

Venden: That's a further indication that we have things turned around. Another statement that you made, Graham, "There is no shortcut to see." This stuff is very important. We have been more than gratified by the response of so many of you with questions, that * some of these questions range back over things that we have already talked about, and some reach ahead. So we don't have time, and it isn't appropriate to cover every one of them every time.

Maxwell: But we won't ignore them.

Venden: That's one other point. Right. All right. You have talked about trust and faith, and again alluded to this, but I don't think many of us, Graham, still have that feeling that faith involves this kind of blind trust. You need faith when you don't have enough evidence, and so you just go ahead and believe. I wish you would comment a bit more about that. We need to get that nailed down.

Maxwell: Well, I wonder who has given that idea such circulation. It seems to me that only the adversary would be pleased with that. But when we trust God, we say, "I trust You, but I really don't have any evidence for doing so." That's what he would like to think. We say, "God, there is so much evidence, I am still studying it. The more I come to know You, the more I trust You." One thing that has caused trouble is the use of these different words. "Trust" is one thing. "Confidence" is one thing. "Faith" is another. They are all the same word in the Bible.

Venden: But still, some very sincere people have talked about faith as a leap in the dark. You go as far as you can on evidence, and then when you come to that cliff, you just close your eyes and jump and hope that you land.

Maxwell: Yes. That's the trouble, I think. History is strewn with the wreckage of those who have been leaping in the dark. You might make it, but it's a very dangerous thing to do. Now, it might be that God has asked me to do something like Abraham which I cannot momentarily cannot understand, but because of all the light in full confidence in One I know very well, I am willing to move forward. I even know Him well enough, that He won't be angry if I question Him along the way. Ah, I hate to call that a leap in the dark. Many use this definition because they really think they are in the dark. I mean, some most distinguished theologians whose presentations are so admirable, nevertheless believe that God has never really revealed these matters to us, and we are in the dark. I admire them for taking life so seriously in the dark. But I'm not going to say my faith in God is a leap in the dark! Christ came as the Light, and I say to God, "I trust You, but I'm surely in the dark." Why do you believe he is in the dark all the time? So often it has been they don't know what to do with the Bible. They don't really believe in a personal God who has really revealed Himself. So in a way, it's this old-fashioned confidence in Scripture that leads us to reject that definition, I think.

Venden: A loss of that confidence.

Maxwell: Yes, you see. But because we have it, we would never say we are in the dark. Look what He has paid to keep us in the light! For faith is the most enlightened, intelligent, rational

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decision we ever make for which we have the most evidence. I mean, I would hesitate to say this, but I have more evidence for trust in God than even you my friend. That's true, isn't it?

Venden: I think that's true.

Maxwell: You know.

Venden: * this question has come up regarding Deuteronomy 13 in the Bible reference sheet. It refers to warning against signs and wonders, and yet when we look in the gospels and the story of Jesus, aren't these miracles that He performed, aren't they a basis for belief?

Maxwell: * says this beginning of signs that He did, and it did say something, to be sure. His mother already trusted Him. She said, "Do whatever He says." I think the miracles do get people started sometimes, but it's not best evidence. Miracles can be counterfeited. Look at the first three plagues in Egypt. A miracle is the poorest kind of evidence, but if we are susceptible to it, our God will run the risk sometimes of using them. Like Gideon's wet fleece and then the dry one. That doesn't speak well of Gideon. It speaks very well of God. He generously gave him those signs. God would rather that we weigh the evidence. So I wouldn't want to say He didn't use miracles at all, but they are a most introductory step in developing faith, and it's a rather hazardous one.

Venden: And the Deuteronomy 13 passages point out the hazard there.

Maxwell: Yes. Because if at the same time they are performing miracles, they are not telling the truth --I am afraid that I watch some programs on the air where there is so much miracle and faith healing, I then listen to hear what they are saying about God. And if they are not telling the truth about God, then never mind those miracles. But I notice the audience is being so swayed by the miracles. They are so excited, they are not prepared to open their Bibles and do some hard study for truth. That is the danger of miracle. It is so dramatic.

Venden: You talked about faith as a gift. I remember that man who said to Jesus, when he was worried about his boy, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." What does God do in a situation like that to help unbelief?

Maxwell: Yes, I have thought about his cry. But this is just what he spontaneously said. He obviously did believe, or the one * wouldn't have been happening that was. He did believe. He just wished he had more faith. Now whether the man understood how God would increase his faith, it doesn't say. You have to look through the rest of Scripture to see that. And my understanding would be that God indeed can strengthen faith by offering evidence, by helping us to think about it, by protecting us from adversary who would becloud our minds and deprive us of our freedom to weigh the evidence. The Holy Spirit even moves. I don't mind the Holy Spirit impressing me. It's just when I feel an impression, I want to make sure it is the Holy Spirit and not what I had for supper. I think a lot of folk feel impressed about something, and it's something else. So God in many and various ways would work. Now maybe the man wanted a miracle at the moment. There is no mention that it happened. He already trusted God enough for this to happen. Jesus said, "You already. . ."

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