

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER SEVEN - 2
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THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

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Number Seven: **"The Question Of Authority"** - another look at God's way of exercising authority - in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government.

Our heavenly Father has been accused of the arbitrary and selfish abuse of divine authority and power. If true, it would not be safe to trust Him. But the whole Bible presents a refutation of this charge - not in mere claims, but with the evidence of demonstration. Even Paul once misunderstood God's use of power - then changed his mind on the Damascus road. Later he urged us not to be so easily swayed by every "wind of doctrine" but to practice being more discerning. (Eph. 4:14, Heb. 5:14)

Many still labor under Paul's earlier misunderstanding, and we are surrounded by conflicting claims to religious authority based on position, power, miracle, or claimed communication from the Lord. How can we practice being more discerning?

Welcome to the seventh 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. The topic for this presentation is **"The Question of Authority"**. This is really just another way of restating the central issue in this great controversy. The crisis of distrust that divided God's family and started the war up in heaven back in eternity described in Revelation 12, is really a conflict over authority.

Now the conflict is not over who has the greater power, God or the adversary. Satan has never accused God of lacking physical power. In fact, the book of James says that whenever Satan thinks of the power of the One who created the whole vast universe, he trembles with fear. He knows he has but a short time. Rather, God has been accused of the **abuse** of divine power and of a failure to tell the truth; specifically, as we have reviewed several times, God has been accused of being arbitrary in His use of power, of being exacting and vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. If those charges should be true, then surely it would not be safe to trust in God. Who would want to spend eternity with such a Deity?

Yet, one third of the brilliant angels, intelligent as they are, have agreed that Satan is right and God has indeed abused His power and is not worthy of their trust, or ours. For thousands of years they have worked to convince us of the rightness of their charges. During these years just as God in many and various ways has sought to demonstrate that He's not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be, so Satan in many and various ways has sought to twist and pervert the truth in support of his cause. Most diabolically, I believe, Satan has used the teachings of religion to support his case. Even more diabolically, he has twisted the teachings of Christianity to support his case. He has even perverted the meaning of the cross in support of his accusation that God demands our obedience under threat of painful execution. "Love Me or I'll kill you", is his most Satanic perversion and caricature of God's warning in the beginning, "If you go your own rebellious, disorderly way, you will die".

Of course, what is the truth and meaning of those words? That is the subject for our conversation next time. I wonder how extensive has been the damage caused by Satan's

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devilish caricature of God's words there in the garden of Eden? If God has really said, "My children, you either love and obey Me, or I'll torture you for eternity in sulfurous flames", how could there be any real love? How could there be any real trust? I wonder how many millions have been turned against God by that perversion of the truth. Or worse, I wonder how many people have found it possible to accept that picture of God and still try to serve Him and offer Him the obedience that springs from fear? Then they have suffered all the destructive consequences of forced submission.

But, of course, the good news is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be. The whole Bible presents a refutation of these charges. It is not a refutation in mere claims, but with the evidence of demonstration. The whole Bible records a demonstration of God's way of exercising authority and power. I think it is very good news that leads us to repentance and trust. This understanding of the way God runs His universe will hold the universe secure and free and at peace for the rest of eternity.

Some of us believe that this understanding of God's way of executing his authority and power is by far the most important of all our Christian beliefs. Every other Christian doctrine derives its importance and even its meaning from this central and essential truth about our God. To some of us the most important information we have to share with our fellow human beings around this planet is this truth about the way God runs his universe and what He wants of His children. We need to share this more urgently than ever before as we humans all together face the closing events of human history. Before Christ returns, the Bible describes (in fact, Jesus describes) a time of confusion and deception such as the world has never seen.

All of that will be leading up to Satan's final attempt to win the whole world to worship him and to trust him. He even asked Jesus to get down on His knees and worship him in the wilderness of temptation. Revelation 13 says that when Satan's campaign is over, the whole world will be worshipping him, except those few who have not been deceived. It should not surprise us, if we are as near the end as we believe we are, that we find ourselves surrounded on all sides by conflicting claims to religious authority. Certainly the development of modern media has made us more aware of this than ever before. As we see and listen to all these conflicting claims, how often they are supported by position, power, miracles, or claims of special communications from the Lord.

How Satan would enjoy it if he could turn God's friends on this planet against their Heavenly Father! Even more seriously, how he would love to deceive God's friends even as they continue professing to be His commandment-keeping people. That would be the most destructive. No wonder Paul said that we should grow up and not be so easily swayed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, Ephesians 4. Again, in Hebrew's 5, he says we should grow up and have our faculties trained by practice to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. These are two passages we will look at much more at a later evening.

The question for this evening is, "**How do we train our faculties by practice so as not to be deceived by all these conflicting claims to religious authority; particularly, the claims of the adversary?**" Then, at the same time, how can we be sensitive to the voice of true authority? The question is about authority. How does God exercise His authority and power so that by contrast we could recognize the counterfeit and the substitute? What does God want of us? Has He ever said to His children, "You either love me or I'll have to kill you?" Did He ever say that? What about Satan's charges that God is arbitrary, vengeful and severe? Has God

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convincingly answered those accusations? How do I know if I am being told the truth? How does God seek to convince us of the rightness of His cause? In comparison, how does Satan seek to convince us of the rightness of *his* cause? Which method do we prefer? Which method do we find more convincing and more trustworthy? Under whose government would you rather live? How do we settle these questions?

Should we pick up our Bibles and begin to read God's claims about Himself? If we do that, almost on page 1 we hear God say, "Don't do that! It isn't safe. Anyone can make mere claims." Immediately my trust in God is increased by His warning me to not accept mere claims. Remember the evening we discussed Deuteronomy 13 and 1 Kings 13? There were prophets who claimed to be prophets but who were lying to us? There were people who performed miracles, but at the same time were not telling the truth. There are many other warnings in the Bible. The 400 lying prophets of King Ahab, the lying prophets of the days of Jeremiah. God has been very candid in warning us not to accept mere claims. What we need is evidence and demonstration.

So when God was accused of being unworthy of the trust of His family and His children, Romans 3:4 says He humbly took His case into court. He invites His children to inquire, to investigate, and to discover to their own satisfaction whether God is worthy of their trust. Imagine the Infinite One submitting His character and government to the scrutiny of His mere creatures. Does that say something to us about God? Paul says in Romans 3:4, "God, may You win Your case when you take it into court." Of course, God has won His case! That is, He has won His case throughout the rest of the universe. It is only down here that some of us are not too sure. He didn't win his case by bribing the judge or intimidating the jury, or hiding some of the evidence. He won His case because to the satisfaction of the whole onlooking universe, the truth, the evidence, was on His side. What evidence? The most costly and convincing evidence that the universe will ever see or ever need (which is the subject of our next conversation - **"Why Did Jesus Have To Die?"**)

Now Satan cannot use this method. He would lose if he did. He doesn't dare use the method of open investigation and inquiry. He wouldn't dare invite our questions, for the truth is not with him. He has used religion to silence inquiry; and diabolically, he calls that willingness to believe without inquiry, faith. Instead of evidence and truth, he has to substitute force, fear, ignorance, miracles, excitement, feelings, pomp, majesty, ceremony, mystery, and especially claims upon claims. Of all these things we must beware and be ready unless we be deceived. Let's not underestimate his cunning. He deceived one third of the brilliant angels.

If we read the Sixty-six books through, we realize how often we have been warned to beware of such things. Jesus Himself warns specifically of Satan's methods. Look at Matthew 24:24. "If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is Christ!', or 'There He is!', don't believe it. False christs and false prophets are going to appear and will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even God's own people!"(Phillips). A little earlier in the same chapter, Matthew 24:4,5, "Jesus answered, 'Watch out, and do not let anyone fool you. Many men, claiming to speak for me, [and how many there are today] will come and say, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will fool many people.'"(GNB) (brackets supplied)

Just to show how far that can go, I brought just one book tonight. I think it is the most unusual Bible I have in my whole collection. I almost hesitate to travel with it lest it be found in my briefcase. This is *the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ as revised and*

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corrected by the Spirits. It is the Spiritists Bible. It is absolutely unbelievable. It came out in 1861. What is so remarkable about it is that it thoroughly rewrites the New Testament in support of Spiritism. Yet, at the end of the introduction, it claims that Jesus came down from heaven, the medium that He was, and the apostles came down with Him, and they corrected all the errors in the New Testament. Then it says, "Dear Reader, trust in God who made all things after the council of His own will. The Holy Spirits feel much interest in this work and the spirits who corrected this New Testament desire that the world will receive this correction as coming from them directed by God Himself, which is true. Signed, Jesus the Christ." This is a diabolical fraud! But look at the claim. Anybody can make claims.

John warns of the use of miracles to deceive. Look at Revelation 13:13,14 (GNB) "This second beast (you remember the symbolism of the last book in the Bible, This second power) performed great miracles; it made fire come down out of heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. And it deceived all the people living on earth by means of the miracles which it was allowed to perform." (parentheses supplied) Speaking of that last time in human history, Paul gives the same warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth...(which is our only protection, of course)." (NIV) (parentheses supplied)

But most seriously, Paul warns of God's professed messengers engaged in this work of deception. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:13 (Phillips) "God's Messengers? They are counterfeits of the real thing, dishonest practitioners masquerading as the messengers of Christ. Nor do their tactics surprise me when I consider how Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (He still pretends to be Lucifer, you know, the bearer of light and truth.) It is only to be expected that his angels will have the appearance of ministers of righteousness." (parentheses supplied)

This, of course, reminds us of Christ's most serious words that He ever spoke, and He spoke them to a group of very devout Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, Bible teachers in His day, who, Bible students that they were, had just denounced Jesus' picture of His Father as Satanic. Think of it! Sabbath keepers, tithe payers, Bible teachers telling Christ He had a devil. He turned to them and uttered those extraordinary words in John 8:44,45 (Kleist and Lilly). You can be sure that there were tears in His eyes when He said something like this. "The father whose sons you are is the devil, and you are bent on carrying out the wishes of your father. He proved himself a murderer at the very beginning, and did not loyally stand by the truth; in fact, there is no spark of truth in him. Whenever he gives utterance to his falsehood, then he gives expression to his real character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. I, on the contrary, speak the truth, and therefore you do not believe me." This is a very wonderful Roman Catholic translation.

You notice that Paul even mentions forged letters being circulated, pretending to be from him and causing early Christians much distress. Look at 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (NIV). "We ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us....Don't let anyone deceive you in any way." From then on he signed his epistles with greater care.

John also warns of false teachers who arise claiming to have the Holy Spirit, and yet it is a fraud. Read 1 John 4:1,2 (GNB) "My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the

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Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere." Paul surely agrees that we should test everything before believing. That familiar text in is 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV) "Test everything. Hold on to the good."

God is not afraid to be tested. That is what is so believable about God. The reason He is not afraid to be examined is that the truth and evidence are on His side. Because truth and evidence were on Christ's side He spoke with great authority, with real authority. Remember those two familiar verses: Matthew 7:29 (NIV), "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority..." Luke 4:32 (NIV) adds "His message had authority."

Now in what did His authority lie? How can we recognize the voice of true authority? Did Jesus base His authority on His claims? No, He inspired the warning against accepting mere claims. When John inquired if He really was the Messiah, Jesus didn't just say, "Yes, I am." He offered evidence to John. Did He base His authority on miracles or show of power? No, it was Jesus who inspired the warning, "Don't trust miracles if they are not associated with the truth." In fact, He even turned the crowds away when they were following Him for the miraculous food and the miraculous healing.

How Jesus must have been tempted to use His power when He was winning so few. He knew the people were expecting a Messiah who would come with great physical power to drive off their enemies and establish an earthly kingdom. But He wouldn't do it. It would have misrepresented the truth and God's way of exercising His authority.

Well, did Jesus base His authority on His loud voice and bombastic manner? This is so customary of many evangelists today. Just read the gospels. The people marveled at the gracious words that came from His lips. "Blessed are the humble in spirit. Blessed are the meek." You simply cannot shout those words. People who shout don't teach things like that. Christ's manner of speaking must have been as music to His audiences.

Was His authority based on who He was? He was the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, worshiped by all the angels. Remember the story of Emmaus. He didn't reveal who He was until He had led them through the Scriptures and until their decision was based on evidence, not on His authority as a person. Yet, think what Person He was. There is a marvelous understanding of the Emmaus road experience written by a writer I greatly respect. "Jesus did not reveal Himself in His true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds. . . He maintained His disguise till He had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in His life, His character, His mission to earth, and His death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, not because it was supported by His personal testimony, (though He was God), but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of His life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of His labors with the two disciples was gained, He revealed Himself to them." E.G.White, 3SP 214, 1878 (parentheses supplied)

You see Jesus spoke with authority, I believe, because He always told the truth and some perceived it to be true. To them He spoke with great authority. But, you see, He did not speak to everyone with authority. Some said He had a devil, to be so presenting His Father. Only to those who recognized that Jesus spoke in full harmony with all the truth revealed up to that time in God's Word did Jesus speak with authority. When John the Baptist received the

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report of what Jesus was saying and doing, he said, "That fits Isaiah perfectly. Yes, He is the one."

The ultimate authority then is the truth. God's only means of persuasion. That is the only safe basis for our trust. So in many and various ways, God has revealed the truth to us and then has invited our questions and our examination of Him, the Infinite One. For three and a half years God lived among us to demonstrate His way of using and exercising authority and power. A few people respected Him. Many people despised Him as weak, just as the Old Testament had predicted they would. They were looking for someone who would lead them mightily against their enemies. They wanted miracles. They wanted free food, free healing. They didn't want the kind of Person the real Messiah proved to be.

Nor did they like His picture of the Father. But some did. Some recognized gentle Jesus as the Supreme authority. I think that is why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek." Not blessed are the weak, but blessed are the meek. Meekness is not weakness, though it is so widely misunderstood that way. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Only the meek, only the gentle would be safe to admit to the kingdom, the kind of kingdom that will be governed the way Jesus exercised His authority and power during those three and a half years. Do you think He will change His methods in the hereafter? He thundered many times in the Old Testament. Those were all emergency measures. For three and a half precious years He ran His kingdom on this planet the way He will for eternity. It didn't work, did it? It worked for a few. It worked with the meek. They loved it. The poor people heard Him gladly. (see Mk 12:37) But most people did not appreciate this kind of government. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Matt. 5:5

That raises the question with us. Which kind of government do we prefer? Under which kind of government do we feel most secure - a powerful tyranny or the gentle exercise of authority and power that Jesus demonstrated for three and a half years? Obviously it would not be safe to admit people who do not respect the authority of truth spoken softly in love. Blessed indeed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

I prefer a God myself, who is infinitely powerful, to be sure, but an equally gracious person who values nothing higher than the freedom and the dignity and the individuality of His intelligent creatures that our love, our trust, our worship, our willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. It would be a pleasure to live with a God like that. That is the quality of life in the hereafter that has been held out for us. We can waste it if we wish, or we can be convinced by the evidence that this is the kind of Person our God really is. We can find him worthy of our trust. Personally, I am convinced that God has more than amply demonstrated that He is precisely this kind of a God.

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Maxwell: It would be nice if everything were as easy as this dreadful New Testament that I have. Have many of you seen it? *The New Testament Revised by the Spirits*. This is extraordinary. I hope it's safe to have it around.

Venden: I was a little worried when you put it back on top of your Bible. I wanted to run up there and. . .

Maxwell: I was going to comment on that, but decided against it.

Venden: I wanted to say, "Graham, don't do that! Put it underneath, at least."

Maxwell: Well, it was the *Revised Standard Version* . . . [Laughter] which I rate very highly. It claims to be all redone by the Spirit of Jesus and the spirit of the apostles. "I was born about 1861 years since in the town of Bethlehem in Judea." And tells what a medium He was. And resurrections means only the resurrections of the spirits. When the body dies, the spirit comes forth a spirit-body. And the Holy Ghost is just the spirit of some holy person which has once been in the flesh. All the spirits of mankind, when they come into the spirit world, have a privilege of progressing, and becoming holy, wise and happy. But the better a person has lived in this life in the flesh, the more exalted will be his condition when he comes into the spirit world.

"I, Jesus, came not to atone for or to forgive sins, but came as a Medium." And so on. The whole thing. Just rewrote the whole New Testament. 1861. And that's the *Spiritists' Bible*.

Venden: Graham, you talked about how Jesus spoke with authority to some. But there were others for whom it didn't have authority. Could you comment on the impression that that might give, that authority is something that I determine by my saying: "Well, OK, I'll regard that as authoritative." Were Jesus' words only authoritative if people decided, Well, we'll let them be? Or did they have authority inherent within them?

Maxwell: Well, to the extent that they were true, they were authoritative. But the authority had no effect unless you perceived it to be true. It's like a rose blossoming and shedding its fragrance on the desert air, and there's nobody to smell it. So His authority, unless it is perceived and acted upon, is not effective.

Venden: OK. But are you saying that authority, then, has a subjective element to it, then?

Maxwell: Yeah, but carefully measured; like your question on the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes to a person - and I believe He comes, and He can give impressions. Sure. I would welcome those impressions. But then I've got to determine the source of that impression, and whether it is reliable; and I want to judge that. But I'm going to judge it by all the truth that I have judged before.

So this accumulates through the years. And happy the person who has a well-informed conscience, and a well-informed mind; because he's been studying through the years. If it isn't, you know, even Phillips' wonderful book, *The Ring of Truth*, can lead you astray. To me, Phillips is one of the finest Christian men who has ever lived. His translation is one of the best.

But you know, it was C. S. Lewis who encouraged him to continue his translation. He did the New Testament, he did four books of the Old. And then he went back and re-did the New. And then C. S. Lewis died somewhere in there. And Phillips says he was sitting in his study, looking at his television screen. And the form of C. S. Lewis appeared on the screen, and said to Phillips, "Don't give up the good work."

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And in his book, *The Ring of Truth*, Phillips says, "That had the ring of truth."

And we'd say, "Well, it shouldn't have rung." Right?

You see, he was conditioned in that way. And he was depressed. He was discouraged. And I'm impressed that whatever it was happened to him, he was told to continue the good work; and it's one of the best bits of good work ever done. It hasn't done any harm, his translation.

It does suggest, though, that what rings as true to you, may not ring true sometime later when you've investigated still further. So our convictions are constantly resubmitted to the authority of Scripture. We constantly hold it out for correction. You never come to the place where you say, "Now you can ring all the bells you like, and I'll only respond to the right ones."

And that's why we need to get together. And that's what the church is for. Because we help each other in this. So you come from your study with a beautiful new idea and try it on your colleagues. And they point out rather quickly that that is even ridiculous. And you put your tail between your legs and go, "Oh," and say, "Thank you, thank you very much. I'll do better next time." That's a service we can perform for each other.

So we never come to the place where we do not resubmit, continually resubmit, our best convictions to the authority of scripture read as a whole. Then it's safe.

Venden: All right. Thank you very much, for letting me step ahead of that— yours. . .

Comment: I just think you've answered my question. It was more on how we determine authority. It seemed to me from your talking earlier — was by reading and reading and reading the whole Sixty-six books. And therefore, when I finally figure it out it's— ideally, we're mature Christians. I guess you just answered how we do it, by the time we do it, we're already . . . I mean, it leaves us kind of vulnerable, it seems to me, in this growth period.

Maxwell: Yes. And that's why the Lord protects us so. Not until we're like a Job, who was so settled into the truth that he could not be moved, did God remove the hedge of protection. And you remember, the devil came and said, "You know why Job is so good — because you protect him. You let me at him, and he'll curse You to Your face."

And God said, "Look, I'll let you at him. You just can't touch him personally."

And so the next time the Heavenly Council met, God said, "Well, what about My servant Job?"

And Satan said, "Well, yes, You're right on the first round. But let me lay my hands on him, and he'll curse You."

And God said, "He's even ready for that." And you remember the rest of the story. And Job did not let God down. I doubt that many of us are ready to have the hedge removed like that. But there was no protection for Job, save his life.

Of course, I judge [?] that the last generation who survive the time of supreme deception, when Satan has a free hand, they will have to be as mature as Job. So settled into the truth that they cannot be moved. And to me that's the meaning of the symbolic "sealing" at the end. It's not we're stamped in various ways. But the Holy Spirit of truth has led us into the truth, convinced us of the truth; and we're as settled into it as Job was.

And God can say, "Satan, you can do anything you like to these people; and they will not let Me down." And they don't.

But that's growth. And I might die halfway there. But that's all right. I die on the way, and I arise on the way - and that's all right. So long as I die God's trusting child, all will be well.

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So I don't have to determine where I am on that thing. Just stay with my Doctor; and He guarantees to make us well.

Venden: All right.

Maxwell: Like your patients have to.

Venden: Right here to your left, Graham.

Maxwell: Ah, yes.

Comment: Christ many times used parables, and used some of these strong ways to get attention, like the feeding of the five thousand, and so forth. But it was in the home of Lazarus, wasn't it, and Mary and Martha, that He could talk without having to. . . You want to comment on that?

Maxwell: Oh yes.

Comment: Because there were many people, I'm sure, that He could just converse with, just. . .

Maxwell: This enters in a very significant way with what has been said. What was the attractiveness of the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus? I think not the least attraction, was that He could get a decent meal there. Because Martha was very busy in the kitchen.

Don't underestimate what Martha did, you know. Well, if you were "baching" it, with twelve apostles, traveling around. You imagine what they lived on most of the time. And so every once in awhile, He'd slip away, and go and visit Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And true, Mary did a wonderful thing. But out in the kitchen, those smells would come from Martha's work— just mustn't overdo it.

Meanwhile, here's Mary, known as a wicked woman in the town. And Luke says she was known as living an immoral life in the town. And Jesus was a bachelor and a young minister. And when young ministers begin their ministry, one of the first things they're advised to do, is not run risks like that. And Jesus ran that risk. And there are nasty books that say He and Mary had an affair. You know, people are just ready to pounce on things like this.

The other way around is, nobody else had treated Mary with respect. She was the woman taken in adultery; the same woman, we're told. And to have this strong man - He was strong; been a Carpenter for thirty years. And we're told that as He walked through the crowds, there was a look of conscious power on His face. I don't know what that looks like on a humble face. But He was some Person, you know; a real man. And Mary, with her reputation, was not treated with much respect. And here was a strong Man who treated her that way. And that really kept the spark of hope alive in her.

Well, this home was evidently the home of people who could afford a nice home. They apparently were educated people. Jesus loved to get away from the brethren who were always discussing what position they'd hold in the Kingdom after the next General Conference - and talk about other matters with these three. And that suggests something, you know. Well, the disciples were men of industry and decisiveness; and He was shaping them to be leaders. But there were some other qualities too.

You know, if you have the benefit of a thorough education, and you're widely read, the things in the Bible ring more bells with you. You can't bring too much meaning to the Bible. Reading is bring meaning to words. And if only we were expert archaeologists, and expert historians, and expert linguists, and expert anthropologists and sociologists, and all the rest of it - think of the meaning we could bring to every phrase in scripture.

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So Ellen White tells us, you know, we should get all the education we possibly can for a worthy purpose. And I think that with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, He enjoyed that.

And so I find, after a hundred trips through, each trip is more rewarding than the one before, because I'm a little older, I've heard more comments from others, I've done more studying myself, And I'm able to read more into these old words than ever before.

So it's a growing experience. I doubt it will ever stop. It could be a million years into eternity, we will be discussing one of these matters in the Bible. It will be very interesting. Don't think we're going to go to the Lord and say, "By the way, we have one thousand questions left over. Could we check them off with You?"

He'd say, "You know I've never done it that way. Let's - do you want to go through the Bible book by book?" He might say, "We'll do it up here." And go through it, with us all participating. That's the way He runs His universe. Much better than just being told, "This is the answer."

If that were God's way, the Bible could be about half a page long. Instead, He's spread His whole historical record out. And it's so helpful to have people in this university among our student body from different cultures. People who have lived in the Middle East can really understand some of the customs in the Bible. They've actually lived where they were followed, you know.

That's why group study of the Bible is most rewarding. It's better if many bells ring, rather than one lonely person. I don't feel I really know something, until I've tried it out on others; and especially, tried to explain it in one of my classes. You know, medical students are not that inhibited. And if you put something ridiculous before them, they'll probably let you know. And that's a great blessing.

Comment: It seems like a lot hinges on personal study of the Bible. And yet, lots of times I know that when I read, I don't come to the conclusion that I wish I would come to. And sometimes it doesn't have a lot of meaning. What do you think is a good way to study the Bible to get some meaning?

Maxwell: Oh, I think that's very well put. Now, when you say you don't come to the conclusions you wish you were coming to, you've already decided on the conclusion you wanted to come to.

Comment: Yeah, 'cause I. . .

Maxwell: How did you decide what that should be?

Comment: You know, these studies have helped. But sometimes, when I read the Old Testament, I don't really come away with the feeling that God desires my best good.

Maxwell: Now, the best thing to do, is cite an illustration. Give us an example. Pick the worst one you can remember.

Comment: One that really sticks out in my mind, is the Flood. And also, you know, we have talked a lot about Abraham. But it still seems like that was really one of the most immoral things that God could have ever asked anybody to do—to go and kill their son. I don't know; I still can't buy that.

Maxwell: OK. You've got two things there: the Flood, and the sacrifice. The Flood is the most devastating thing God ever did. The only thing that will match it, will be the death at the end of the millennium. Except there'll be this difference: I believe that the death at the end of the millennium will simply be the result of God giving people up to the consequences. Whereas, with the Flood, He did it. He did it.

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Comment: unintelligible comment (short).

Maxwell: Yes. Well, knowing that He is accused by the adversary of being arbitrary, vengeful and severe, why would He put into Satan's hands the best evidence Satan could even pray for? I mean, as soon as the devil caught his breath after the flood, he must have sat there in amazement and said, "I can't believe it! I mean, why would God give me the best evidence I could possibly desire?"

And I suspect he toured the whole universe in glee, and said, "I told you He's that kind of a God. Either you love Him; or if you don't love Him, He'll drown you."

Or a little later on, God provided Sodom and Gomorrah; and Lot's wife; and Korah, Dathan and Abiram; and Nadab and Abihu; and Uzzah; and the she-bears. And the list goes on and on and on. And then you begin to ask yourself, when you read so many of these, "God what are You trying to do to Yourself? You're ruining Yourself. You're not helping Yourself at all. If you had hired a Madison Avenue company, they'd have done better than this! They'd have written up a nice record. You know, like the ancient kings used to, when they weeded out everything unpleasant."

Why didn't God weed out the Flood? I mean, if it's something He had to do, at least don't put it on the record! But the amazing thing about God is, He put it all on the record; and spelled it all out in detail.

And so then I have to say, "God, the only alternative I have left is, that could not be gentle Jesus. Now, He would not do that."

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who looks upon this little child." You know that whole — did you learn that poem as a girl? I learned it too.

Well, you know Jesus wouldn't do that to little children. "Suffer little children to come unto Me." And in the days that I used to repeat that, I used to look in a big red book my father had - quite an old one - that had full-size pictures of these great events in the past. Oh, I remember it showed the Assyrians, and what they did with their captives. I don't know why I remember this unpleasant one. They'd flay them alive, and hang their hides on the walls of their cities.

That's what makes Jonah so amazing. Jonah was asked to go and preach to those cruel people. Made it very difficult for him. Especially since he was afraid God would forgive them; and he didn't want that.

But with the Flood, one of the most moving pictures in that whole big red book - and when Dad died, we all sat around, the six of us, and divided up the books, and I got the big red book. I have it at home now. And it shows the last little dry piece of land - top of a mountain. And there's a mother and her baby, and there's a lioness and her cub. Have many of you seen it? You know the one! You've seen the one. Oh, that— for a little child! I could just feel what was going to -- I wasn't worried about the lions or the adults; I was worried about that little child, when I was small. How could God drown little children?

So after awhile you come to the conclusion, because of the impression that is widely given by adults, that you know who did that. That had to be the Father. And you know who thundered on Sinai. Jesus talked gently; so that has to be the Father.

And after awhile you build up your whole theology on the basis of all these stories. And you say: No wonder Jesus had to come and die and assuage the wrath of this offended Father. And no wonder He had to hurry up on Resurrection morning back to that Father and start pleading with Him, and saying, "Father, Father, please forgive." Because the Father in His heart does not find

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it possible to forgive His children. He's the kind who drowns people and sends she-bears.

And so then you read Hebrews 2 and Hebrews 4, and this theology builds up into a massive thing. You see, one member of the Godhead had to come down and find how hard it is to be good. And He came down and was tempted in all points, as we discussed last time, yet without sin. And so He learned to become a merciful and faithful High Priest.

And He went back to the Father, and He says, "Father, please, please forgive. There was a day when I agreed with You, Father. But now I've learned some things You do not know. They think You're omniscient down there. I know You're not. There are some things I understand You don't. Please forgive Brother Jones."

Would you like to know you've been admitted to the Kingdom, over the Father's protest, because the kind Son has begged the Father to let you in? And so the thing builds up like this. And we say: If the Son stepped out between us and the Father, all Hell would break loose. And we see the Father getting angry, you see. We build a whole structure of theology on this thing.

And then you get over to I Corinthians 10:4. And it says: The One who led Israel through the wilderness was Christ.

And Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father anyway. So don't ask whether it was Me or the Father who caused the Flood. We did. So you know I'm gentle, meek and mild. Why don't you ask Me how could we possibly have brought the Flood? And I'd like to explain."

But they never asked Him a one of those questions like the one you raised. You know, we ask each other as mere mortals. They had God, right there, who'd brought the thing. And they never asked Him! That's one of the most stupid things in all history. The only thing more stupid, would be for us now not to ask.

So we ask: God, how could You do it?

I think He's been waiting for us to ask. Because if we leave that as a skeleton in the closet - and we've got about fifty more skeletons like this in the closet - we have the uneasy feeling that if we ever fell into the hands of people who are not friendly toward God and the scriptures, they could really confuse us by dragging all those skeletons out.

And it would help me to go to a university where they didn't allow any skeletons in the closet. Everything was out. And that's a great discipline. You can't hide anything.

Well, I found we do not have skeletons in the closet. Take it and take a look at it. What were God's alternatives? He knew He risked being misunderstood, and still is to this day. He knew He'd be apparently playing into the hands of the adversary by doing this.

But supposing He hadn't done that. The whole human race would have ground to a halt. The eight He saved were not that good, as we've discussed. Though He spoke with great compliments about Noah. I don't know about his drunkenness afterwards; but maybe the carbon dioxide in the air was changed by the Flood, and he was quite innocent in this. And Ham had his problems.

The thing is, in a few years there might have been not a friend left on this planet. Then what would God do? So I could imagine God turning to the Heavenly Council, these hundreds of millions described in Daniel 7 as watching God run His government in an open way. Everything He does is open and discussed by all the members of the family. And He invites us to discuss it too.

And He may have said to them, "Can you bear with Me through something terrible? You may

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wonder about this for many, many years."

And they watched Him drown all but eight. And they must have discussed that up in Heaven many, many times thereafter.

Now we have the picture in Revelation, that angels are fully satisfied; that there was no other way for God to do what He did. How do we feel about the Flood?

The alternative would be to say, perhaps: If I do this thing, then the devil is really going to make fun of Me and mock Me, and feel that he's supported in his charges. I think rather than run that risk, I'll let the earth wind down. And they'll just destroy themselves anyway, given a little time.

Wouldn't that be true of the human race, if there were no restraints?

And then I could say to the universe: Well, it's not My fault really, is it? I bore with them a long time; and so they're done. All right, why don't we just wipe out that one little blue planet?

Do you remember when they first went to the moon? And on the way, they turned the camera around, and we had our first glimpse of this world. And it was a pretty little blue planet, like a little marble. It was very pretty; not the kind you'd shoot first; you'd keep that one till a little later. But that's all it was. Who would miss it in this whole universe?

I think the angels would have borne with Him and say: "Well, You tried, and it's all right with us." And I think they would have meant it.

But seeds of doubt would have remained in the universe unanswered. And God will not leave them that way. And so He's paid a terrible price in the hazards of misunderstanding, all through these years. Apparently there was no other way.

Same way with the destruction of the wicked at the end. Is there any other way? It's almost as if God says to us, "Please, suggest to Me some other way." So that's what I do with the Flood.

Venden: The Isaac. . .

Maxwell: Oh, the Isaac thing. Again, I would want to put it in that whole setting, of Abraham being such a friend of God. And we have evidence that God loves to speak with pride of His friends, before this family of the universe; because He did of Job, you know.

And look how God defended Joshua the High Priest. And there are other events. Romans 8 speaks of God being for us, and He defends us. And Abraham had been such an outstanding friend, that throughout the rest of the scripture, he's described as the number one friend of God, and the example of trust, and what God really wants of us.

And then, you remember, he lied about his wife. And as I think we discussed once before, that was a very, very pale lie. Because they were related, other than through marriage. And moreover, if you wanted your wife to inherit your property, you adopted her as your sister. So he must have thought that that was not too bad. That's regarding things legalistically.

The thing is, he did not have confidence that God could protect him through that experience. And so he devised a way of sparing himself and his wife from difficulties. He did the same, you know, about the baby - Isaac. They tried to figure out their own way there. And you remember, through Hagar, they created the whole PLO.

None of these ventures proved to be too profitable at the time; but God loves the Arabs, as far as that's concerned, to be sure! It's only when Abraham was willing to trust God under very difficult circumstances, that God could really say to the universe, "Now, there's a man that I can really trust."

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And so He asked him to do something that was not so difficult in that it was a sacrifice of his son - not a murder - the command is "Thou shalt not murder" - to take the life of his son. Now, this would seem utterly strange to us, but sacrifice a child was not so uncommon in those days.

But this is not really the issue. The thing is, that God had said, "You've wanted a boy all these years. Miraculously I'll give you a son. And more than that, through that son I'll bless the whole world. All the nations will bless you, Abraham, because— through this son that I've given you."

So now God has promised him the son, has given him the son, and everything's working out beautifully. And God seems to reverse Himself. He says, "Go and sacrifice your son."

And Abraham couldn't make sense out of that at first. But he said, "This time I will not do what I did last time. This is the most difficult problem I've found myself facing. But number one, God, I want to know if it's You speaking." The matter of authority had to be established. So he had to know God very, very well, to be sure that it was God speaking. And I don't know, but what they had more conversation than is on the record.

But eventually Abraham satisfied himself: This is God; the One with whom I conversed about Sodom and Gomorrah, and other problems. This is God asking me to sacrifice my son. I'm sure He will have some solution here. I don't know - I doubt I'll be sacrificing my son. If I do, He'll resurrect him. Or maybe He'll provide a substitute. I really don't know what He's going to do. But one thing for sure, He's telling me to do it; and I'm on my way. And I know He won't mind if I ask Him, "Why, why, why?"

And he never slept a wink. While Isaac slept at night, he was asking God, and trying to think it through. And you know, it says near the end, that he wished maybe for just a little sign, maybe? I mean, here he was so mature and everything. But like Gideon wanting his fleece; even though Abraham was so mature, a wee sign maybe? And there was a light over the mountain, and he took it for that. He didn't really need that. He'd been on his way anyway.

And then he lifted his knife there. And he loved the boy. There was no murder there. He loved the son. And the son was submitting. And God said, "That's enough!" And He turned to the universe and said, "Any more questions about Abraham?" And, "Silence," to the devil, you know. "No more accusations against Abraham." It was a very dramatic demonstration.

But apart from its setting, it wouldn't seem significant enough. We'd have to put it in the total setting. Do you think, though, that would be immoral and unethical of God, to ask him to do such a thing?

Comment: It seems so, you know, I mean, when you think about it; if I had a dream at night, and God was telling me to kill my son - I know, I wouldn't pay any attention to it!

Maxwell: No, I'd have. . .

Comment: I'd be [unintelligible]

Maxwell: Sure, I'd be right with you. Sure. Unless you knew for sure that God -- this assumes you've been in long conversation with God the way Abraham was. They had terrific conversations, you know. In fact, Abraham, on record, one time said to God, "Wait a minute, God. Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" See.

Comment: Yeah, see, now why doesn't the Bible record him questioning God at all? See, and it praises him for the fact[?]. And yet it seems like God has given the command, and he rushed off to do it.

Maxwell: Well, Hebrews suggests, you know, that he thought through that God would be able to

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resurrect his son or provide a substitute. He said to Isaac, you know, "The Lord will provide a substitute." So there are hints here and there about his reasoning it through. You can be sure that if he discussed Sodom and Gomorrah with God, he discussed his son Isaac with Him on that occasion. This was his way with God. Pity that the record is so brief, to be sure. Yes.

Of course, killing animals, you know, would be distressing. The SPCA should have been . . . what is the animal one?

Venden: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Maxwell: Yes! You see, they should have rushed in there and said, "Wait a minute, God. You can't tell Adam to kill that little lamb; that innocent little lamb." See, there's a lot in this that's hard and cruel. Oh, it's cost a lot to clear things up. And Abraham was willing to go through the pain of clearing things up.

Comment: Dr. Maxwell, there has been through the ages, and I guess even now; first of all, there's been: "If you don't obey Me, I'll zap you, and that's it." Then there's been: "Well, if you don't obey Me, I'll burn you for a little while, until you just kind of wither away, or throughout eternity." Then there's been: "I'll burn you for only the time you deserve." And now you say that, "I'll give you up. You know, if you do what I say then you can have life eternal. If you don't, I'm going to turn My back on you, and poof - that's it."

How is that merciful? How is that gracious? I mean, you got, you're saying, "OK, well, I better do what's right. Because if not, then God's going to give me up; and that I'm going to die."

Maxwell: One answer would be, to read right through the whole Bible, and pick up all the places where He talks about giving you up, and what is the result of being given up. The shortcut would be to go straight to the cross, as we do next week, and watch Jesus die. For He was given up.

And I'll want to tie some things together that I'm sure you're familiar with. Let's, say, we choose the phrase, "God poured out His wrath on His Son; and hence He died." What is His wrath? The Bible over and over, says God's wrath is His giving people up, sadly, to the consequences. Romans 1.

In fact, we could tie this down very neatly in Romans. Because in Romans 4:25, it says not, "Christ was put to death for our transgressions." It says, "He was given up." And it's the exact same word that's used for His wrath in Romans 1:24,26,28. And then we go to the cross to see if that's the way it works.

And we stand there and we watch Him die. And we hear His cry, "My God, My God, why are You beating Me up? burning Me up?" "Why have You given me up?"

And then, if we're full of the Old Testament, we remember Hosea 11, where God says, "If you're bent on leaving Me as incorrigible rebels, I'll have to let you go. But as you go, I'll cry, 'How can I give you up? How can I let you go? Why will you die?'"

So we know the Father didn't turn His back on the Son. He watched the Son die. And the Father cried as the Son dies. And the Son's crying back, "My God, My God, how can You give Me up?"

And He's saying, "How can I give You up?" But He did.

Now, we don't know the engineering of it. What reverent word have we got to describe this? But there are many questions we don't need to ask: of how God became a Man; and how the Father and the Son arranged - oh, that's an inadequate word - this experience so the Son could die.

All I need to know is, did He really die? Was it a terrible death? Did the Father touch Him? Not

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once. But He died. Did anybody touch Him? Yes. He was tortured. By the Father? No! But by a group of devoutly religious people who thought God did such things.

And one of them was Saul, who believed in that. And that's why Saul conducted evangelism in terms of persecution - and even execution. You know, they executed Stephen in God's name as heretic. And Saul said, "That's good. That's what God would have done."

So you see, the God of Saul, could kill His Son to pay the penalty. Saul had that legal conception about relationship with God. After the Damascus road, never again. And when Paul wrote why Jesus died in Romans 4:25, he said "Christ was given up for our transgressions." And God giving us up, is the meaning of His wrath. And Saul was steeped in Hosea, and Chronicles, and many other places where God so describes what He'll do to His children who choose not to love Him.

So God is very much involved. In fact, the Holy Spirit would be involved. In fact, all Heaven would be involved. Think of the agony there, as the one Member of the Godhead who had become human so He could die, died. He also fell to the ground, dying in Gethsemane, and nobody touched him there.

So that's the answer to the question: Does sin lead to death? But is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God? Well, what's wrong with misunderstanding that? Well, look what it did to Saul to misunderstand it. Made him cruel in God's name. Look at the people who tortured Christ to death in God's name.

A false picture of God, can make one as cruel as the picture we have of our God. Imagine worshiping Molech, who demanded living babies burned in his cupped hands. Imagine what it would do to you. People become as cruel as their gods. And during the days of the Inquisition, they burned people in God's name. That was the most popular form of evangelism. A very warm sort of evangelism! And it won a lot of souls - who terrified, cried out, "I recant! I recant!"

Great! Got another soul to report next week in church. Tough, you had to suffer; but never mind. You know, it's only the soul that matters.

See, there's a lot of bad theology mixed up in that whole thing. And the worst theology is the picture of God. We become like the God we worship. So the way we interpret the cross, determines the kind of people we become, and the way we treat each other, and the way we conduct our evangelism, I believe.

So, I know some folk would say, "Well, He just says well, I can't watch. I'm going to go away and let you die." Oh, God's there suffering; as He will suffer with us in the end. I think as the wicked die, you look up; God will be crying: "Why will you die? I could save you. If you'd just listened now."

You know, this is just hypothetical, it won't be so: But if right in the middle there at the end, and everything's about to end, somebody'd shoot his hand up and say, "Wait a minute, God. I think I see it. I think I see it."

"Oh," He'd say, "stop this whole thing. By the way who made the mistake of him being out there instead of in here? If he's teachable, he should be in here."

But you know, you can speculate on that to illustrate the fact - there's nothing arbitrary about the death of the wicked in the end. God will give them up as He gave up His Son. And they will die; and He will cry. But they'll die. So God's very much involved in that, it seems to me.

What do you think, though? Because you've already thought about that carefully.

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Comment: I guess it just seems like, you know, people say, "Why don't You put them on a planet somewhere? You know, why not just take earth, and just leave it there, and just [?]."

Maxwell: Yes! He could take everybody and put them on a rather large planet, maybe. And then, of course, lest they destroy each other, they'd all have to be kept in solitary confinement. Now, which angels are going to volunteer to do warden service there?

Comment: Well, the angels don't destroy themselves. You know. I mean.

Maxwell: You mean the bad ones?

Comment: Yeah, I think. . . I don't know. Obviously doing a lot of stuff, so. . .

Maxwell: Yes. The picture we have at the end, is that everybody turns against everybody at the end, you know. At the moment they have a common cause, a diabolical cause, honor among thieves, till they this dreadful thing done.

But for God to save all sinners? He could! This is an option; you know. He could save all sinners if He could build a big enough penitentiary, and keep them all in solitary confinement.

But God says to His universe, "Please children, can you understand? I cannot abide the thought of being a prison warden. In fact, I refuse. I will not do it. Do you want to volunteer to do for eternity?"

And so God will simply leave us to leave the consequence, which He has put off and off and off for centuries, you know. We're all under grace. Nobody's under law, or we'd be gone. We're all under grace until the time comes when His graciousness is of no longer any influence whatever on those who are hardened in their resistance. And He sadly leaves us to reap the consequences. The saddest day in eternity for God, as He watches millions of His children die. Especially number one. When Lucifer dies, His most brilliant child; you know how He'll feel.

Comment: So I guess its like [?] the consequence of anything. If I work in the garden, and my carrots just won't do right. You know, they just won't come up -- then I'd just have to ahead and let them turn to fertilizer or something. [Laughter]

Maxwell: Well, I'm not sure I relish that entirely. But there will be a lot ash that would be useful, you mean, when the Garden of Eden is restored? No, I don't think so.

Well, there's a nice scientific answer in Peter which was never intended to be scientific: "The very elements will melt with fervent heat," and there will be nothing else to be distributed.

Venden: I like the way he put that, in terms of natural consequence. [Maxwell: That's the big thing.] And with that comes an element of warning, to say, "We'd better take this seriously." It's not a God threatening us with fear. But nevertheless, the subject is a very solemn one, to say: What choice am I going to make; and what consequences am I going to choose to live with?

Comment: I'd like to comment about Abraham.

Maxwell: Oh, yes.

Comment: There is a similar experience in the Bible with an entirely different ending. And that's one way God tells Moses. He says, "Just step aside. I'm going to destroy this people and make a people out of you."

And what did he say? Did he take Him seriously? He says, "No! You must be kidding. I mean, if You are serious, over my dead body!"

Maxwell: I think that's good. The same Abraham had the same experience as Moses, you see.

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When God said to Abraham, "I'm going down to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah," Abraham says, "God, no! Not if there fifty, forty, thirty, twenty saints there. Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

So when he heard God say, "Sacrifice your son," some message came through there that was different. He said, "God, I'm on my way." Whereas, as you said, Moses responded to God: "No, I won't step aside and let You destroy them. You'd ruin Your own reputation."

And Peter on the roof, as we discussed last time, when he was told to rise, kill and eat, said, No. Three times, said No.

So I wish we had a complete record of the conversation that led to Abraham's conviction that this time, yes, I'll be on my way.

But I love the way it turned out in the end. You know, I think with many things in life, when it's all over and we look back, we'll see that we would not want to have been led in any other way. And so in retrospect, Abraham could see. At the time he couldn't.

Comment: Have you considered the possibility that if he had been wiser, and if he had said: OK, well, Isaac is not just my son, he belongs to my wife too. And it's only fair that I discuss it with my wife. Wouldn't you say the ending would have been different? If he had done what he should have done?

Would you do something like that without consulting with your wife?

Maxwell: Well, of course, he knew Sarah maybe couldn't handle that too well; and in mercy he didn't tell her.

Comment: Maybe she would have handled it better. Maybe she would have said, "Listen. . .

Maxwell: You're doing a very interesting thing that is a possibility on many stories - to think of alternatives, to think of what God might have done when sin first arose in His universe. And I like to do that. I like what you're suggesting. I could imagine him waking up Sarah and saying, "I've been asked to do this." And you could imagine the conversation that they had.

The thing is, that in the Bible we have the record of what actually happened. And then we have to follow that through and see if we like the way it worked out in the end.

Because - I don't know whether I mentioned some of the options that God could have considered in the beginning, on the matter of handling sin. Here are these sinful thoughts being entertained in the mind of His number one angel. Right in the Most Holy Place, in His very Presence.

And God could have said, "Now, good management here would mean that I nip this thing in the bud. Now, the only way I can do that is to eliminate this beautiful angel of mine. And if I do eliminate him, there are some who know him and will miss him. But that's easy, because as a good administrator, I've caught this very early. And what I'll do is simply wipe out from the memory of all of those who would miss Lucifer, any memory of him."

And you know, there are many people who derive comfort from this thought - that we'll be comfortable together in the hereafter, because we'll have no memory of unpleasant things. That's the only way David can meet Uriah and not come to blows. Because when David meets Uriah, he'll never know he stole his wife and arranged for his murder.

We don't have enough confidence to believe we could remember and still be friends. In fact, we almost feel we couldn't be comfortable with God if He still remembered, so we're hoping He will

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perform some divine amnesia. Because, would you be comfortable meeting God in the hereafter and knowing that He remembers every last little thing you ever did in your whole life? Wouldn't you always be groveling there? And say, "Oh boy, I wonder if any minute now He'll bring something up."

And then there's your guardian angel. Who'd want to associate with him? I'd be avoiding him like the plague! Dodging from planet to planet, you know. I don't want to hear my guardian angel say, "You don't know how many times I asked for transfer to a more promising prospect." [Laughter] You know! This could be very embarrassing in the hereafter.

And so we say, "Well, everybody's going to forget, everybody's going to forget." Well, this pertains to the subject of the evening.

God isn't going to win the war on the basis of evidence, and then destroy all the evidence. That would be dumb. The evidence will all be there, and the number one monument will be Christ's human form. And the marks are there. And in the museum, I hope the Ten Commandments are there, and the Sacred Box, and all the rest. Why not? To remind us. I hope there are several copies of the Bible, *King James* included — any one of them. You know, let's have them there, for us to look at and remember. The beauty is, that we can remember and still be at peace.

God could have wiped out memory and created another Lucifer, and another one, and another one. Every time sin began to arise, He could have nipped it in the bud; and then blotted out any memory, lest He be served from fear. He could have done that an infinite number of times. Now, there's cheap peace! Why not? That's a good deal, isn't it? And we never would have known. Nobody would have known but God Himself. Couldn't He carry that? Oh, He's infinite. I'm sure He could.

Now, all we know, is what He did do. He didn't manipulate minds. He didn't block things out. He went public with it all. And He's paid the price. And that really says something about God. And I think He chose this route, to let us know that He's not going to maintain peace in the universe by some clever manipulation behind the scenes. It will not be done. It will be absolutely open and above board. And that makes for real trust.

So what I prefer to do with these stories. I love to do what you've done. And it's very entertaining, you know. And I call that "sanctified speculation." But all we have in the Bible, is a record of what actually happened. So then I hold my breath, you know. What's going to happen to this one? What's going to happen to this one? And it turns out great in the end. Seems to me.

Comment: There is something about this Abraham and Isaac story that disturbs me. It looks as though God is asking Abraham to go back to the religions of his forefathers, where they sacrificed children. How did Abraham handle that? I mean, yeah, it disturbs me.

Maxwell: Well, you're bringing up a very interesting subject. And if we opened that whole one - that is, the influence of heathen religion on God's people in the Bible. I'm very familiar with that. It was my business to learn about that.

If you would suggest that Abraham was influenced by a very gross and cruel and heathen, satanically cruel, heathen practice, when he was being described as one of God's best friends, and his act in sacrificing his son, is extolled in the book of Hebrews, in chapter 11, as an example of real faith, now, we have got a problem that will undermine right through scripture.

I do not see Abraham doing such a dreadful thing, and then God saying, "I'll put you in Hebrews 11 because of what you did." It couldn't be. Then it means that the one who wrote Hebrews is also influenced by these things. Maybe all the rest of the Bible writers are. And I know there is a

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school of thought that says: Many of the things in the Bible that seem unethical to us, are so because they were influenced by the religions all around them; and the Bible writers didn't know God that well. And that's why He's described in many, many places, like telling Hosea to marry a woman of dubious reputation: [this school of thought says] He no doubt did no such thing, because that would be unethical.

But you see, if you're going to go that route, what about the belief in the virgin birth? You see, that is a pagan, heathen idea. In the mystery religions that surrounded Christianity when it was growing, the commonest view was, that a dying, rising Savior was born of a virgin mother through union with the God of the universe. He lived a good life, died a cruel death, then was resurrected and exalted to divine-human sonship. They practiced Lord's Suppers; They ate the flesh and drank the blood; and they were washed in a fountain filled with blood. And you name it -- it's all there.

And so at the University of Chicago where I went, the official - well, there was no official view - but the view that had developed most particularly at Chicago under the leadership of such scholars as Shirley Jackson Case and others, was that all of Christianity can be traced to the environment. That's where it all came from. Environmental factors in the development of early Christianity. Or books like *Jew and Greek Tutors Unto Christ*.

The Resurrection? There was no resurrection! They thought there was; and they believed it so much.

Then you go back to the Creation - myth! And so bit by bit, the whole Bible goes.

Comment: This was at a seminar, you mean?

Maxwell: No, this was at the University of Chicago Divinity School. And this is a widely-held view among scholars the world around.

You ought to read the books! Hundreds of books on religion in the time of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Well, you know the view that the Ten Commandments came from the Laws of Hammurabi - and all the rest of it. And there never was a Moses. First five books were written by many different authors. All the rest of it. "Wonderful myths so inspiring, but not really true."

So the moment we start allowing for too much influence of the religious environment on what's going on in the Bible - particularly on the hearers of the Bible - there is no place to stop. Some folk want to consider a few isolated instances, without realizing that they're jeopardizing the Resurrection, and the virgin Birth of Christ, and a whole lot of other things. Virgin birth was a common idea in the mystery religions. So that is a very dangerous route.

On the other hand, though, God has always met people where they are. They did live in that environment. And you will find reflections of the heathenism around, in many significant ways.

Like, "Don't boil a kid in it's mother's milk." Which seems puzzling. Except when they finally dug up the written records of the fertility worship of the Canaanites, they found they used to boil a kid in its mother's milk.

And so God says, "Don't you do it. Because when you do something like that, it will remind you of those seductive rites up in the mountains where you love to go." And Hosea says the leaders of Israel were going up into those mountains to sacrifice with the cult prostitutes.

Of course, then we turn around the hundred and twenty-first Psalm: "I will look unto the mountains. From whence cometh my help." Oh no. "My help come from the God who created the mountains." As Jeremiah says, "Don't trust those hills and the orgies in those mountains.

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Don't do it." The Bible's very clear on the meaning of that verse.

But God is saying to His people, "Don't do things that remind you of those irresistibly seductive indulgences up there in the hills. Don't do it. Be smart. You alcoholic, don't walk by the saloon halfway through. And don't take out your cigarettes and smell them on the third day of the Five-Day plan. I mean, Don't be stupid. Burn the lot. Walk around the block."

So you see, this is so practical. There's common sense in all of this. But I hate to see any suggestion that some of the best friends God has ever had—and under Inspiration they are recommended to us as models and examples—being so influenced by heathen practice.

So I really resist the thought that Abraham got up to do a heathen thing. It's even described, you know, as a type of the sacrifice the Father made of His Son. You know, I mean, there's too much significance attached to that event, for us to write it off as the influence of heathenism in the environment.

Abraham stood out against that heathenism. That was what was so marvelous about him at the time. So there are other alternatives. But you raised that - you really opened Pandora's box there. And in all fairness, one should let everything come hopping out, and look at them all. The alternatives are really devastating, particularly to attribute the Bible - things we cannot understand in it - to the ignorance of the writers; or to the intrusion of heathen practices in the beliefs and teachings of saints, and even writers in the Bible.

Ah, I don't know where you stop there. You say, "Well, then that's why they wrote about the Resurrection. They were influenced by the heathen beliefs around them." Where do you stop? That was too big a one. I mean, I hope I did justice to it. But that's a marvelous subject. Get the books and read them.

Comment: You mentioned that we must consider the whole setting, the whole Sixty-six books. And I think if we consider the setting of that thing, we can compare it to our own lives. When the Lord takes us through a trying experience or a dark experience, we can know that a blessing will follow that if we are submitted to Him and if we really love Him. Abraham knew that if he was submitted to Christ, he would receive a rich blessing afterward, which he did.

Job knew the same thing when he was taken through a hard trial. He received great blessings afterward. There are innumerable stories in the Bible to this effect. And when some hard experience comes to us like it did to Abraham, if we obey Christ and are submitted to Him and love Him, we'll know that the Lord will take us through that hard experience, and then we'll have wonderful blessing afterwards.

Maxwell: Yes. I think one has to really trace the whole life of Abraham. You know, how his confidence in God grew. And over Sodom and Gomorrah he said, "Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" And God says, "You're absolutely right. I wouldn't burn it if there were five. But I can't find five."

And so his confidence in God grew. And then when he let God down, three times, and things didn't turn out well, but God was gracious and took him back — I mean, this is in the maturity of Abraham's experience there. And he says, "God, this time, You've asked me to do something; I can't make sense of this at all. I really can't. But I know You're doing what's right. And I'm going to trust You. I can't imagine what's going to happen; I can think of a few things. You might provide a substitute; You might resurrect my son. I don't know, God, I'm just going not knowing. But I trust you." And God says, "That's all I'm trying to establish." And then the story turned out beautifully in the end.

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So the fact that He asked him to do something that seemed so utterly extraordinary -- the rest of us couldn't take that, you know; any more than we could take what Job did.

But He was specially attuned to Abraham's experience at the time, to make a point for the universe to see, and for us to learn from in our time. So if it seems unbelievable, that's right. He says, "God, I'm really going in faith, based upon my years of friendship with You. I know You well; it's not a leap in the dark. I'm going right with You, and I'm just wondering what's going to happen in the end. I really am."

And he got closer and closer, "God, what are You going to do?" And then he came. He says, "See, Isaac, I told you." I mean, you ought to read the end of the story. They lived happily ever after. It's a great ending behind that story.

Venden: This man at the back corner has a question.

Comment: I'd like to go back to the Flood. And we have a tendency to concentrate on the wrath of God, and not the mercies of God. Now I think that if we compare Jonah with Noah, we will see where God shows His mercy. He would have shown His mercy in the days of Noah. Did He not give these people a chance to go in the ark with Noah? Didn't Noah preach?

Comment: I see God as giving everybody a chance to be with Him.

Maxwell: That's the longest evangelistic series in history, you know - 120 years. That's pretty long; Elder Detamore never did one that long. . . 120 years.

Comment: Couldn't those people have changed their mind?

Maxwell: Oh, and many of them may have. I mean, how many people died during the 120 years, convinced of the truthfulness of Noah's message? And they will arise in the resurrection of the saints. You know, we don't know how many souls he won. They didn't all live till the end, did they? He may have won lots of people during the 120 years. The amazing thing is, that God knew He'd only need one little boat.

Some wonder about God's foreknowledge, you know. Will He know about future moral choice? Somehow, He knew He'd only need one little boat. How come God didn't build a fleet of one hundred Queen Mary's in case - not knowing, you know - that many might respond? He said, "Noah, you'll just need a little boat."

Comment: The [?] thing is, though, we're seeing that all of the people He killed, and God as being cruel. But those people chose death.

Maxwell: They were invited to get on the boat.

Comment: Sure, a lot of them might have been saved and died; whatever, yes. But the ones that died - I'm convinced that they chose death. If they chose death, then how can we blame God for killing them? He allowed them to exercise their freedom of choice. And I think anyone who dies and does not accept God or Jesus Christ, they are exercising the free will that God gave them.

Maxwell: What bothers the children is the children that drowned in the Flood, you know; the children that died in Sodom and Gomorrah. They worry about Achan's family. When I've asked the children for many years, you know, about that story, they don't worry too much about Mr. and Mrs. Achan getting it. You know, they can imagine how adults might deserve it. But the children, that's something else.

Comment: Well then we have to realize that God is a God of love. And if we are thoroughly

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convinced in our heart that He is a God of love, then we accept what He does. We may not understand it, but to criticize it in a way that would hurt our religious or Christian experience - then it becomes dangerous for us.

Maxwell: Yes. Now. One, you know, everything can be carried to an extreme. You could say, "Well God, I know You always do the loving thing. So I'm sure it was loving to drown them, and it will be loving to burn people in the end. And I'll let it go at that."

No, I'm carrying to a way extreme. Some do that. But then we lose the opportunity to understand. God says, "I'd like you to understand how conceivably a God of love, could give up His children in the end, and watch them die. I want you to understand." Or it's a blind faith, which you're not recommending, to be sure.

But I do think that when it comes to difficult stories, if we have enough evidence of God's love and trustworthiness elsewhere, I'm willing to say, "I know You'll do the loving thing."

It's Biblical. You remember they brought the question of the girl who had married this brother. And one brother after the other died. And according to the Levirate rules, each brother had to raise up children to his deceased brother. So she married all seven. And they said, "We've got you on this one, Jesus. Whose wife will she be in the hereafter?"

And He said, "You don't know what you're talking about. In the hereafter, you'll be as the angels," and He just passed on with that. I think that we can just leave that up to the Lord, that the hereafter will be at least as good as now! [Laughter]

But children particularly, little children -- well, the best question I was ever asked along this line, was at a youth retreat up at Pine Springs. And there were some girls off on one side during the afternoon discussion in earnest consultation. I wondered what they were thinking up together. Finally they put a hand up gently.

And they said, "When the Lord comes, if a woman is four months pregnant, what will happen to the unborn child? I mean, would it be born on the way, or up there, or. . . ?"

Then they went a little further and said, "Supposing it's a wicked woman, you know, and she dies with this unborn child; will the baby also be resurrected in the same condition? So will some mothers be burned in the fires at the end with unborn infants within them?" These girls were really concerned about that.

And I said, "The only text I've got for that, is that story of the girl and the seven brothers. Don't worry about it." You can think up a thousand things like that. And the Lord says, "The main thing is to be there; and you will find that I will take care of this in such a way, you will be entirely satisfied. Do you trust Me for that?"

If He was going to have a handbook that would cover everything we could dream up, it would make the *Encyclopedia Britannica* look like a notebook. Just imagine. I have a solution announced as to everything I'm going to do, in answer to every problem. If we trust God, we'll be willing to wait.

So there are many, many questions that one might even in anguish -- a mother loses her baby at birth. "Will I have my baby back?" You know, when a mother has really asked you that. Like, a mother's been trying to have a baby for years, and years, and years, and years. And finally, to their happy amazement, one is on the way. And then it's stillborn. And she says, "Will I have my baby back?"

Venden: Our time is gone. We've got about six hands up, and we're going to have to ask them

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to trust the future.

Maxwell: For March 16.

Our Loving Father in Heaven,

We relish Thy invitation to ask our questions; and we ask them in all reverence and respect. And surely there are many things we could ask, the answers for which we will have to wait.

But surely there is sufficient evidence for trusting Thee. And if we only trust Thee as much as the thief on the cross, all will be well. But who would want to settle for the little that he knew, wonderful as it was? As life goes on and we have a chance to know Thee better and to look over the evidence, what a waste it would be not to look at everything that has been recorded and preserved, especially since we know the enemy has sought to destroy the evidence. Thy providence has worked in many and various ways to keep it available to us, and has never been so available as in our modern times. What a waste not to use it all.

And then, what a waste not to get together as fellow believers, to ask our questions of each of each other, and together of Thee, and of the evidence. For surely good things happen. And I'm grateful for our conversation this evening.

Surely we have reason to trust Thee, to be willing to wait on some things. But to have enough trust to survive what's coming. When Satan comes to do to us what he did to the angels with such devastating success, forbid that we should still be vulnerable in that day, unprepared. But may we be so settled into the truth, that weakened, short-lived pygmies that we are, we will succeed where one-third of the angels failed.

We will hear his most cunning misrepresentations, supported by all kinds of miracle and power; and yet not be deceived. We thank Thee for the evidence that makes that possible. And we thank Thee for making the evidence so clear.

And most of all, we thank Thee for what the evidence has cost.

In Jesus' Name, Amen

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD 7Q: QUESTIONS

Louis Venden and A. Graham Maxwell

Venden: Graham, in what you said this evening, you mentioned how God's response to the great controversy was not a great show of power, of force; you said He took His case into court. I wonder if you might explain just a bit more what you mean by the word "court".

Maxwell: Oh, I wondered if some might be a little bit confused. That is an absolutely magnificent verse in Romans 3:4. Sometimes it's translated, "God, may You be shown to be right in what You have said. May You win when men would judge You." And the verse is so crucial in understanding why Jesus had to die, that I thought in our next conversation we'd really look at Romans and put on the Bible reference sheet a number of versions of Romans 3:4. Now I deliberately choose the translation that I use. The closest to it is Goodspeed, though I modify that slightly. "God, may You win Your case when You take it into court" just rings a bell with me; it fits there. Then this is the court of the universe.

Venden: Oh, that does answer what I was wondering. By "court" you mean the entire universe, and we would be even included in that, could we say?

Maxwell: Very much. And I would want to use many passages in scripture that speak of God taking His case into court. Look at the gathering in Daniel 7, where a hundred million are watching. Or in Job 1 and 2 where God conducts that conversation with the adversary about God's friend Job. Many references to this in scripture.

Venden: All right, now our subject tonight it seems to me, raises many questions that have come up in the past, and I would like to *press? quote? (17) some of these questions if I might, because when you talk about God's approach and authority and establishing the authority of truth and trust and love, didn't God in fact use force and power? Isn't the Old Testament record filled with incidents that would support the idea that here is God putting on a show for us?

Maxwell: There is no question, and that's what always astounds some people who have never read the Sixty-six Books through when we meet to take one of our trips. Innumerable times God is pictured as showing His physical force and power. I don't think He ever did it to win anybody. In fact, I don't think He ever won anybody that way. He did it to get attention. Or at the time of the Flood He did it, and how He must have wept over His children as they died there, in order to maintain His contact with the human race. But if it puzzles us, how it must delight the adversary to have this information to use. I think the devil is puzzled that God would hand him so much evidence in support of his accusations.

Venden: But, for example let's take a few instances, which I think we ought to because they do raise questions. Here is Saul or Paul on his way to Damascus, and we probably referred to it here, how Paul misunderstood. But here he is on the way, and Acts says that a great light flashed from Heaven and he falls to the ground. That's a very impressive use of force or power. Didn't it win Paul?

Maxwell: No, it just floored him. But He got his attention. And I would judge, with a man like Saul nothing less would have gotten his attention. I mean, he was a firebrand. Now, already he was quite tormented within because of the behavior of Stephen, and when Stephen said, "Lay this not to their charge," he must have remembered the report that when that Heretic died on the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them." And Saul knew his Old Testament so well, he knew that that's the picture of the ideal. And so in order to stifle the prickings of his conscience, he

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went out to conduct another evangelistic effort. Instead of settling the theological problem, he went out to conduct this effort. So God floored him on the Damascus road, and He got his attention. But then notice what God did. He just said, "Saul, you're having trouble with your conscience, aren't you?" And he said, "Yes, I really am." "Well, why don't you give in?" "I give in. What do You want me to do?" And Christ didn't say, "The following, and be sure you do it." No, the Lord says, "Your way is to overwhelm people. Mine is go and talk to Ananias, one of your peers. That's all I'm going to say." And from then on, Paul never pressed anybody. He said, "If you disagree with me, well let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind." Before that he put them in prison or had them stoned. Now he realizes that persuasion can only really come when in the highest sense of freedom you are convinced yourself, and he adopted that method. Now he knew God. Didn't change his diet, his Sabbath, his dress, his Bible, even the name of his God. But he changed his picture of God. But he wouldn't have done it if God had not hit him with a two-by-four on the Damascus road.

Venden: So the show* (53) of force there was to get attention and necessarily function.

Maxwell: Well, we know from human experience with our children or as teachers, you have to do this.

Venden: But what about it? I remember my father getting my attention that way sometimes. What about some other instances in the Old Testament? Let's go back to Mt. Carmel and Elijah, and the fire that comes down and licks up the stone and the water and the whole business.

Maxwell: Now that's a classic case because it's so dramatic, consuming everything. I remember as a boy thinking of the stones burning and the water being lapped up. It's significant, though, that when all the excitement dies down, Elijah was depressed himself. That sort of thing doesn't last, doesn't have holding power. And so he ran away and hid in a cave. But his spirits rose when he felt the earthquake and he heard the wind and he saw the fire, and he thought God was approaching. And it's so significant that the Bible says God was not in the wind, He was not in the earthquake, and He was not in the fire. And then there came the sound of a small silence, "the still small voice" - versions are very colorful in translating that - the sound of a very small silence. And Elijah was informed that that was God. God is willing to use these dramatic means when the circumstances call for it. But when He has a friend, and He wanted Elijah to grow up and be more His friend, no more wind, earthquake and fire. Just the still, small voice of truth. And I'm impressed that soon after that Elijah was ready to be translated to heaven.

Venden: Does that same principle, then, perhaps provide answers for some of the others that people have raised questions about?

Maxwell: Stories without number. If it didn't fit consistently, I wouldn't find it very believable.

Venden: Yes now, but what about the plagues of Egypt? Just the tension there? Isn't there judgment involved?

Maxwell: Yes, well three things. Usually God is saying several things at once with great skill. The Israelites themselves were tempted not to trust God, because in those days you measured your god by success on the battlefield or by your personal prosperity or the prosperity of your nation. What kind of a God would be the God of a people in captivity? Meanwhile, the Egyptians thought their gods were stronger, because they had tyrannized the Israelites and their God. So the plagues came, certainly encouraged the Israelites to believe that maybe God could do something after all. With the Egyptians, since so many of those plagues were directed toward their deities, Exodus says, has God saying Himself, "I am judging the gods of Egypt."

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He demonstrated the weakness of the gods there. So God was encouraging the beginning of trust with a show of power. Now that's elementary, it's fundamental, but one must at least be convinced that He's infinitely powerful. Before we will be respectfully willing to listen and follow Him, eventually all the way to the cave and Mt. Sinai and hear the still, small voice.

Venden: Be willing to listen.

Maxwell: Christian life often begins with a little thunder and then ends with the still, small voice. But why take so long between? Some people want thunder all their lives.

Venden: There are a couple of other cases that, well, people have raised these questions. Take the case of Uzzah, you remember the one who reached out, and he was so anxious to support the ark to keep it from falling off the cart - I Corinthians 13, I think it is - and he dies at that point. Now, God doesn't just get his attention; his life is over.

Maxwell: That's right, he's dead. And where Uzzah will be in the hereafter is between him and God. I mean, some like to think maybe he repented at that moment. We don't need to know. I think all we have to do is put that story in the total setting, and the total setting for that one is quite a long story. Why was the ark on the cart in the first place? Was it not because the sons of Eli - Hophni and Phinehas - had been such gross misrepresentatives of the truth? They were even assaulting the women when they came to worship in the temple, you remember? They were that wicked. So then when Israel was drawn into battle, they thought, "Let's take that magic box with us." No reverence for God, but they thought the box might help. They took it into battle and they lost it. And in due course of time the ark wound up in front of Dagon the fish god. And God is working now for these heathen people as with Egyptians. And in the morning, you remember, when the priests came to conduct their worship of Dagon the fish god, here he was toppled of his pedestal in front of the ark. Well, they didn't dare tell anybody, but they propped him up and then said their prayers, "Oh almighty one, bless us this day." The next day when they came in, Dagon had not only fallen off the pedestal, but he had broken into several pieces, so they hastily glued him together, put him back on the pedestal, and prayed, "Almighty one, look after us this day." And presumably some small child may have said, "How come we're praying to the almighty one whom we've just glued together?" And so they consulted the theologians of the faith* (100) all in detail there, and the theologians said, "We advise that you send that box back, and we suggest you put some gifts in it. Remember what the God of this box did to the Egyptians and remember how Pharaoh hardened his own heart." They've got it right there, "hardened his own heart". These heathen theologians did little better than some. . . .

Venden: They remember that even though *(104)

Maxwell: . . . they had it all dead right, too. And they said, "We better send it back." Well, as the story proceeded it was on the cart coming home, and Uzzah lived in a family that knew better than to treat the ark with such disrespect. It was an act of irreverence, as how they lost the ark in the first place, and where there is no reverence, there is no listening to God. Where there is no listening, there is no help and we're lost. So it's when we've been our most irreverent that God has run the risk of being most dramatic to see if He can inspire a little respect. And the devil, I'm sure, mocked Him for doing it. But what else could God do? Just let them go? No, He tried to inspire some respect, and there are many, many stories like that that run through the whole Bible.

Venden: So the way that they were handling the whole thing was . . .

Maxwell: Well a little later on, you remember, David was very angry when Uzzah died. He was so angry he left the ark right there. And then he got reports from the threshing floor there, you

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remember - was it Obed-edom? -

Venden: God was blessing.

Maxwell: God was blessing and David said, "We need that blessing up here at headquarters." So they researched the matter and learned with what irreverence they had carried the ark. And David confessed. He said, "We did the wrong thing; we were disrespectful. This time we carry it up with care." And so they did, and you remember he sacrificed a great many offerings. Possibly even that was a fire insurance too. David still didn't know God as well as he did later on. And you see this growth of knowledge of God proceeding, but behind it a very patient God who used dramatic means all the way to the still, small voice to win us back to trust. That's the reason we do the Sixty-six books, by the way.

Venden: One more out of the Old Testament. That story of Elisha and the young people's society that came out and ridiculed him and then he called down a curse upon them and two she-bears.

Maxwell: Two she-bears.

Venden: That again looks like a pretty spectacular *(120). . .

Maxwell: Well, one would first need to establish the irreverence of the day. And you read back a little further, and the king of Israel was consult Beelzebub the god of flies. Now if our church here knew that you and the pastoral office were consulting Beelzebub the god of flies, we'd know that the University Church was in a sorry plight. The king of Israel was doing this. Moreover, these boys knew that Elijah had been translated to Heaven, and they were so unimpressed that when Elisha came by, evidently a little short of hair, they said, "Hey baldy, why don't you go up too?" The irreverence in Israel was so serious that God almost lost contact with His people there. Not a flood this time; two she-bears. And the word went out among Israel, and reverence picked up, but so did fear. How difficult it is for God to relieve us of our fear and still maintain our reverence and respect. That's the most delicate thing to accomplish.

Venden: All right, you've spoken well about these incidents in the Old Testament, but now you referred this evening to when Jesus Himself was here, and we have this period of His public ministry. Even during that period there, in terms of similar things that Jesus did - for instance, at Cana in the transforming of water into wine - wouldn't that catch attention? Wasn't that use of miracles to establish authority?

Maxwell: These methods do have a beginning. In fact, I wouldn't deny anybody the right of using whatever method he wishes to get attention. What follows after the miracle? And also with Christ, it's the way the miracle is conducted. Now to turn water into wine is not that unique. You remember when the water was bitter in the wilderness? Moses turned it from sour water into sweet, and didn't Elisha do something similar? That's not so remarkable. What's more remarkable that's there is that Jesus was attending a wedding, and He wanted it to be happy. And He was very pleased to, as we often say at weddings, don't we often read this, that He sanctified that wedding with His presence there? Because He's the One who thought up marriage in the first place. I love it that His first miracle was at a wedding.

Venden: You will grant that He did occupy a function of getting attention.

Maxwell: He got attention, but then they had to test Him which they did, and rejected Him and some accepted Him.

Venden: Take some of the other things such as the feeding of the five thousand or the feeding of the four thousand a little bit later, and that's recorded in all the Gospels I believe.

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Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: Certainly it made an impact on the writers of the Gospel and on the people. They were ready, if I remember it correctly, with the feeding of the five thousand, weren't they ready to crown Him King right at that time?

Maxwell: That's right. Now this illustrates the point superbly. Because He realized that huge crowds were following Him for the miracles, and that's all. And so you remember, He told them something very serious, meaning, "Unless you really accept Me and My teachings you will not be saved." And they all left Him.

Venden: That's true.

Maxwell: Yes, all they wanted was free food and free healing. And so then He turned to the twelve and said - some translations say, "Do you also wish to go." The Greek is extraordinary. There's a way of asking a question that gives the question yes or no. Be wonderful to use for exams here in the University; every question has the answer on the front. But the way it's worded in the Greek, Jesus said, "You don't want to go too, do you?" And they said, "No; to whom else should we go? You have the words of eternal life." They weren't entirely convinced, there was so much they didn't understand. But at least they chose to stay. He must have wondered then whether it was worth coming. How much of a following had He won? Only when He performed miracles did He get a crowd, and He did not wish to get a crowd from the performance of miracles. Doesn't it say something though, that when He won a following by miracle He turned them away, and that is the wrong reason for power.

Venden: The raising of Lazarus. Dead for four days. Isn't that outstanding evidence of authority, wouldn't you believe just on the basis of that performance?

Maxwell: We call that His crowning miracle, don't we? And yet it's significant that Elijah had resurrected the dead before. It was not that unusual then. It wasn't unique anyway. I think it's the total situation within which He did this thing. For example, He had just been crying awhile before; He wept. And they said, "Behold, how He loves him." The gentleness of Jesus is what was disappointing for many of His followers. But then He demonstrated that He can resurrect the dead. And the theologians knew what this implied. And that's why it says, "From then on, they plotted to murder Him." Because they realized that step by step He was demonstrating beyond question that He was the infinitely powerful but equally gracious One who fitted the Old Testament description. More than that, He had the wisdom to wait until the fourth day and they must have realized it. I mean, the wisdom with which He did things. He didn't display His erudition to be sure, but He knew that they had questioned His resurrection of Jairus' daughter before. And so this time He waited until the fourth day, because some of them believed that the spirit hovered nearby for three days in case of resuscitation. So He waited until the fourth day until the most skeptical person in His audience would admit that this time Lazarus was really dead. And then when He said, "Roll away the stone," He wanted to hear them say, "Don't roll it away," an important key text "he stinks." Because they would all admit that he really was dead. "Now," He said, "come forth." They had no answer for that. And when you've run out of evidence, then you turn to violence and they tried to kill Him.

Venden: So that did not serve to convince them.

Maxwell: No, it actually turned them against Him all the more.

Venden: . . . feel that he was dead. *(175)

Maxwell: Yes. But to some of us that God could one minute be crying and the next minute He's

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resurrecting the dead, now that sounds good to me.

Venden: Satan went about to plot Lazarus' death.

Maxwell: That's right; if * (176) we'll just get rid of the evidence. Here's Lazarus going around explaining his death and resurrection. They didn't like that testimony.

Venden: You spoke of the charge that God is arbitrary, harsh, severe and so forth. The question has come in, "If you're talking about arbitrary, isn't something like the fourth Commandment - if you take the Ten Commandments, you can kind of understand most of them, but when you come to the fourth and here's the seventh day - isn't that arbitrary? someone has asked. Well, it is often so described and therefore it makes a beautiful test of our obedience. Just obey because God said it. Remember our bumper sticker last week: "God has said it; I believe it; that's all there is to it." Then the Sabbath won't be much of a blessing. And Jesus said, "I gave it to you as a gift; you weren't made for the Sabbath." The only remedy for that is to go back to Genesis and read all Sixty-six. That's the remedy for every question in my book. And if you start in the beginning of Genesis you find all the meanings of the Sabbath. The Sabbath reminds us of all that was revealed about God during Creation Week, the message of freedom and His sharing His creative power with us. And then it was given to remind us of the Exodus. Again it's a monument to freedom. It came after Crucifixion Week. The Sabbath reminds us of all the answers given Crucifixion Friday. And then Hebrews says the Sabbath is a type of the rest to come. I don't know of any commandment that has more reasons. Therefore I will not call it arbitrary. It is the most meaningful and significant one. But it comes from here a little and there a little, you see. When we take the Bible as a whole, God has never asked us to do anything arbitrary.

Venden: All right. Maybe the fourth, as you have said, it would seem that it does have a great deal of meaning if you look at the whole record, all Sixty-six, but what about the first commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"? That's just a plain flat out statement.

Maxwell: Yes. I enjoy when people say the fourth is arbitrary, how about number one? "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me, and I am a jealous God. I don't like it when you have other gods."

Venden: It's sort of peevish. *(193)

Maxwell: Well again, if you take the whole Bible and you are convinced of the kind of Person God is, I am glad He says what He does. If He were not in support of freedom and the quality of life that He has revealed, then it would be arbitrary of Him. But God says, "Being the kind of God I am, wishing nothing but the best for you and valuing nothing than your freedom, I don't want you to go after Dagon the fish god and Molech - Molech would require your babies burned alive in his hollow hands. And there's crocodiles and frogs in Egypt, and Ashteroth and Baal; don't go after them. In fact, if you go after something abominable you will become abominable yourself. God says, "Actually if you make Me your God, then like Me you will become - ever more free, ever more intelligent. Don't hurt yourself.

Venden: It's said out of love; it's answering love.

AGM. Right. But if you'll only be un-arbitrary, if God is the kind of Person we believe Him to be. He says, "Don't lose your freedom and every other good thing you have by going after these degraded deities. Stay with Me. I am jealous - that is, I am jealous for you. I don't want you to be hurt." I like that.

Venden: Just as we would not want our children to have anything * (205).

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Maxwell: Isn't that kind of jealousy all right? I always felt my parents were jealous for my reputation. I derived great comfort from that. My mother wouldn't tell on me for anything. And so we have a God who is jealous for us, His children, and it's marvelous.

Venden: I want to shift gears just a little bit. Someone has asked this question, and I can sense a bit of frustration, Graham, with this question: If scholars and theologians still disagree about God, what chance do I have to figure all this out?

Maxwell: Yes, well I like to read the Gospels again. They're not that complicated. I think theologians have made it complicated. It impresses me that the poor people heard Him gladly. I think we're the ones that * (211) it maybe might appear to be difficult.

Venden: It's not that the evidence if we'll examine it ourselves is that difficult.*

Maxwell: That's right. That's right.

Venden: Over the last couple weeks I have received letters from an individual who has talked about the impression of the Holy Spirit. This person even spoke about being awakened at night and going into his bathroom and turning on the light, and he describes how the Spirit came on him and he wrote and wrote. Now, that leads me to a question that someone has raised: If I pray for the Holy Spirit to guide and then I have this deep conviction, and this individual spoke about what great conviction that the Spirit has come, isn't that enough? *(216)

Maxwell: Fortunately the Bible warns us of that and sets up some protection. This warm feeling of conviction within could come from prejudice, it could come from indigestion, it could come from all kinds of things. So the Bible warns us that if it seems the Spirit is directing you in a certain direction, He will not lead you away from what He has already inspired. So we should always judge the work of the Holy Spirit by the scriptures which He has previously inspired.

Venden: But what difference does it make what kind of Person I believe God to be? Now that's a bit of a different question, but it's related. So long as I submit to His authority. If I just say, "God has said it; I believe it; that's it."

Maxwell: Well, I think of two illustrations that come quickly to mind since we've talked of Saul. The conception of God that Saul had led him to conduct his evangelism the way he did before the Damascus road. In God's name he imprisoned people and he had them stoned to death. When he got the true picture of God on the Damascus road so dramatically, and by the way it suggests it didn't have to take a lifetime, I think Saul proceeded from the foot of Sinai to the mouth of the cave in a few minutes. He really grew up in a hurry there. Paul changed his picture of God and he changed his whole method of evangelism.

Venden: So you're saying that the picture inevitably affects * (227)

Maxwell: * the way we worship, the way we witness to others, the way we behave.

Venden: Someone has written this: "Our great dane is gentle, faithful, patient, trusting, of lovely disposition." This is truly demonstrated far above any sermons I've heard, or any human demonstration that we have witnessed. This kind of wonderful quality of character, does this say anything about our lack of achievements along these lines in the human element? You have a great dane.

Maxwell: Oh, I rather like that. We have our third great dane right now. I think we can learn a lot from nature. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," and so on. But even the posture of a dane - magnificent! We sit slouching. There are so many ways in which the animals are an example to us. But in faithfulness; you mean a dog that weighs more than we do, having its enormous

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strength, being safe to have around in the house all the time. However, I wouldn't want to be just a dog. I love it that the dogs can do all these wonderful things, but our dog, our dane for example, is very clear about her relationship with my wife, but I think she still thinks I'm just another dog! I've tried to explain this to her, and since she's just a dog it's more difficult. I think it's wonderful that the mere creatures can show these wonderful qualities, and I think it speaks well of God.

Venden: Graham, we're going to have to postpone two or three of these until next time. I wondered if we could come back to one other one that we touched on before: the question Why did Jesus have to die? Wasn't God's mercy sufficient? Is that what we're getting to in number eight?

Maxwell: That is the climax really of everything. Everything points to the cross. And fortunately, that's where all Christians agree. We may have many different theological opinions, but almost all Christians agree we ought to go to the foot of the cross, we ought to watch the way Jesus died, we ought to listen to His cry and ask the question, "Is death the result of sin, but is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God?"

Venden: So number eight is one that we just must not miss.

Maxwell:

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