

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER TWELVE

GOD'S LAW IS NO THREAT TO OUR FREEDOM

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Number Twelve: "**God's Law is No Threat to Our Freedom**" - another look at the requirements of God's law, and especially the Ten Commandments - in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government.

Jesus, Paul and Moses all agree that love is the fulfillment of God's law. But love and trust - the things that God desires the most - cannot be commanded or produced by force. Nor can they be made an obligation, something that we owe to God because He's been so good to us. God wants more than this, and so should we! Our Heavenly Father values nothing higher than the freedom of His family, and Jesus suffered and died to prove it. But real freedom requires love and trust that have been won and confirmed by unquestionable evidence. This evidence is the truth that sets and keeps men free.

Then why does God seem to command our love in the Decalogue? The Ten Commandments voiced on Sinai were another of God's emergency measures in the great controversy. But how He longs for love, trust and willingness to listen that are entirely free from fear, force or obligation!

This emphasis on freedom, love and trust does not minimize the requirements of God's law. On the contrary, these are the very things the law was designed to preserve. As one good friend of God has said, "The Ten Commandments were given so that there would be no mistake as to the kind of people God could trust with all the privileges and freedom of eternal life to come." Does this include the Sabbath? The Sabbath is the reminder of the evidence of the truth, without which we never could be free.

Welcome to the twelfth of our conversations about God - another look at our Heavenly Father in the light of the universe-wide conflict over His character and government. "**God's Law Is No Threat to Our Freedom.**" This is an opportunity to consider yet once again the actual requirements of God's law, particularly the Ten Commandments. Is there anything more precious to intelligent human beings than freedom - freedom from tyranny, freedom from fear, freedom to do the things we want to do? We believe that God means for us to be free. The good news is that God values nothing higher than our freedom. But not all His children have believed this. In fact, Satan persuaded one third of the brilliant angels that this is not true about our God. He claims that God is, instead, arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. How God has worked to make it clear that He is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be.

Yet this war, which began up in heaven, that we call the great controversy continued and extended to this planet. How many of us in this world believe Satan's lies? Many, even among very devoutly religious people, even among Christians (who of all people should know better), believe Satan's lies.

For thousands of years now, God has sought to reveal the truth in this matter - not in claims, but with the evidence of demonstration. In our last conversation about God, we considered some of the emergency measures God has used to hold the family together, while

He goes on demonstrating the truth. Most notable of these emergency measures has been His use of law. Most notable among the laws, has been the Ten Commandments.

But God's extensive use of law surely seems opposed to freedom. It has indeed been seriously misunderstood. Consider, for example, Jesus' words to His disciples in the passage found in John 14:14; 15:14 (RSV). "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. . . You are my friends if you do what I command you." What kind of friendship is it that demands obedience? How do you fit, "Keep my commandments," with "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free"?

Sometimes this is explained to mean, that we are free so long as we do exactly what we are told. Have you parents ever tried that with your children? "Now children, we want freedom in our home. We can have freedom so long as you do exactly what you are told. Do I make myself clear?" If your children are afraid of you enough, they will say, "You have made yourself clear." But inside they may have serious reservations. It seems such a contradiction. Of course, everything depends upon how we understand what it is that God has asked us to do, and how we understand the reason why He even had to ask us in the first place.

I believe, as I am sure many of you do, that all of God's laws, particularly the Ten Commandments, were given for our best good. They were given especially to preserve freedom, not to infringe upon it. But law and the use of law have been seriously misunderstood throughout the great controversy. The most notable example of misunderstanding occurred about 1400 years after Sinai when the Son of God came Himself to live among a people who had been especially entrusted with this revelation of God's will formulated in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. Of all people, they should have understood it was an emergency measure. With Moses there to explain, "there was no need to be afraid." When Jesus came, He found a group of people who were totally preoccupied with God's laws and with obedience to their every detail. He never had to tell them not to make a graven image. They had learned their lesson in the discipline of Babylonian captivity, and they never sank into ordinary idolatry again. He never had to tell them which day was the Sabbath. They regarded it as their highest duty to obey all ten of the Ten Commandments. He never had to urge them to pay tithe. Matthew records that they used to tithe even the tiniest things, the seeds of the mint, anise, and cumin.

Nor did Jesus have to tell them they should obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on the fact that they would even strain gnats out of their goats milk lest they should eat a forbidden insect. Nor did He ever have to tell them to search the Scriptures. He said they did it all the time, though they did it for the wrong reason (Jn 5:39). Nor did He ever have to tell them to be careful with their association with unbelievers. In fact, when they came in from the market place, they used to wash themselves in certain ceremonial ways lest they be contaminated by association with the Gentiles (Mk 7:1-23). You see, they all could say, like the rich young ruler, "All these things I have obeyed from my youth up." (Luke 18:18-30)

You would think that in the face of such rigorous obedience and willingness to do precisely what they were told, Jesus would be pleased and they would recognize and welcome Him when He came. But all heaven watched the incredible scene of those who claimed to love God's law, denouncing the Lawgiver as a lawbreaker. It must have puzzled the angels a great deal. So Jesus ventured to suggest that while they were working so hard to obey, that actually they were obeying for the wrong reason. Because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they really were not obeying at all. You can imagine how offensive this was to them. In fact, He went

further and suggested that if only they knew the God who had given the law, they would keep the law for an entirely different reason. . . a reason that would make it possible for them to be obedient and free at the same time.

The Old Testament prophets had dealt with this centuries before, you will remember. Just to mention two, Amos and Isaiah had chided the people for their very reluctant Sabbath keeping. "Oh, when will the Sabbath be past that we may buy and sell and get gain?" Amos records (Amos 8:5). Isaiah deplors their mechanical unthinking obedience, particularly on the Sabbath. Jesus quoted those words of Isaiah and commended him for telling the truth. Look at Isaiah 29:13 (GNB). "The Lord said, `These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.'" Another translation (RSV) says, "Their worship of Me is but the commandments of men learned by rote." Rote, unthinking worship, is such an insult to our intelligent God.

Then Jesus set out to tell the truth about His Father and the kind of obedience that is really pleasing to Him. You recall what He did at such great risk on the Sabbath. It was all so innocent and good. He healed people and helped them. But those gloomy legalists were shocked and they denounced Him for disobeying the law. Think of the Lawgiver being denounced as a lawbreaker. "No", Jesus said, "I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets", (not just the Ten Commandments, the whole Old Testament), "I have not come to destroy it, (or misrepresent it,) I have come to fulfill it, to explain it to you." (see Matt. 5:17) (parentheses supplied)

By teaching and example, especially on the Sabbath, Jesus set out to correct the wide misunderstanding of God's law and to explain what it was all about. He said, "the law was given *for you*, especially was the Sabbath given *for you*, to be an advantage, not a restriction." He spoke these words one day as He defended the right of the disciples to pluck some ears of grain and rub them in their hands to eat them. "The Sabbath was made for you, you weren't made for the Sabbath" (see Mk. 2:27,28). As He thought of all the books of rules and regulations they had accumulated, in effect He was trying to say, "The Sabbath that you work so hard to keep and which has become such a burden to you, was given to help you, not to be a restriction and certainly not to be a mere test of obedience. If only you knew the truth about God and His laws, you would find that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light." Look at those famous words in Matthew 11:28-30 (Goodspeed). "Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you and learn from Me, for (though I am God) I am gentle and humble-minded, (Have you ever thought of the Infinite One being humble-minded?) and your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light." (Parenthesis added).

You would think the people would be relieved to hear this right from headquarters. But instead they accused the Son of God of blasphemously misrepresenting His Father. They even said He had a devil, to be talking about God and His laws like this, and they condemned Him as lawless and crucified Him as a heretic.

Then the apostle Paul took up the cause of those who denounced Jesus as a heretic and who denounced His picture of God as false and even Satanic. At first, as you know from the record, "Saul" also obeyed for the wrong reason. He worshiped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people persecuted, imprisoned, even stoned to death, to force them to obey.

That was the kind of God which he worshipped. He had many texts, he thought, to support it. He conducted his evangelism in the name of that God. That is why he felt free to use so much force. Then on the Damascus road he saw the light and the truth set him free. (see Acts 9:1-19) What a difference! He didn't change his Bible or even the name of his God. He didn't change the day he worshipped for Sabbath, his diet, or his dress. What did he change that day? All Saul changed was his picture of God. From then on, who has spoken more eloquently about freedom and faith and grace, about "Christ as the end of legalism as the way of being saved," (see Rom. 10:4) and that "we're not under law, but we're under grace" (see Rom. 6:14) because we worship a gracious God!

Of course, don't misunderstand me in my new emphasis, Paul said. Do you think my emphasis on love, trust, and freedom abolishes law? We read last time in Romans 3:31 that faith does not abolish law. Faith establishes law by putting it in its proper perspective. But what is the proper perspective? Well, if you adopt Paul's understanding of the meaning of faith and trust, the person who really knows God, loves Him, and admires Him for His wise and gracious ways, feels utterly free and perfectly willing to listen to everything God has to say. He wants to give careful heed to all of His instructions. It is only wise and sensible to do so, once you are convinced God is that kind of a Person.

"So let me tell you," said Paul, "why our God, Who desires His children to enjoy the dignity and freedom that He has paid such a price to guarantee to them, has made such use of law. 'It was added'," he said, as we considered last week, among the emergency measures. As Galatians 3 says, the law was added to be our guardian, our custodian, our attendant, our guide to bring us back to a right relationship with God; when we will do what is right because it is right and not because we are being ordered to. That word is translated from a Greek word, **paedagogos**. **Paed**, you recognize as being in pediatrician, and pedodontics, means a "child". The second part, **agogos**, means a "leader". A **paedagogos** is a "leader of children". That is what the law is. It is designed for people who behave like children. How we have misbehaved as children! How, as sinners, in our rebelliousness and our disorderliness and immaturity, we have needed the guidance and protection of God's laws. Behind all those regulations, behind these emergency measures, surely by now we can see a very gracious God who has used all these emergency measures for man's best good. There is nothing arbitrary about them. They make very good sense and they deserve to be intelligently obeyed.

How apparent this becomes when we look more closely at precisely what it is that our God has asked us to do, particularly in the Ten Commandments. However, more than that, we must understand **why** it is that we had to be so instructed by these emergency measures. Look at 1 Timothy 1:8,9 (Phillips). "We know, of course, that the Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet, we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control . . ." If you have self control, you don't need to be ordered to behave.

But the law does not give self-control, does it? The law is an emergency measure because we lack self control. We need it until we recover self-control and love and trust and so be able to use our freedom aright. This is what Paul explained to the Galatian believers who were so prone to a misunderstanding of God's use of law. Look at Galatians 5:13,14,18,22,23 (NIV). "You, my brothers, were called to be free. . . The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' . . . But if you are led by the Spirit, (the Holy Spirit of love and truth) you are not under law. . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (parentheses supplied) (Look particularly at the last fruit of the Spirit. . . self-control. This is the real meaning of the word translated "temperance" in the *King James Version*) That is where real self-control comes from.

Some people want God to command and control them for the rest of eternity. That seems to be so humble and safe, but it is telling God that we don't want the freedom that He has paid such a price for. How can we hand it back and say, "No, I don't want self-control. I want You to control me"? Isn't it marvelous, God says, "When you are fully under the influence of my Holy Spirit, I won't control you. You will have recovered the dignity and joy of self-control." Then we really will have freedom once again.

As you know, this idea that "love is the fulfilling of the law" was certainly not new with Paul. Jesus had said the same thing to the inquiring lawyer, you remember. But the first one to say it was Moses. Jesus and Paul quoted the man who was instrumental in giving the commandments in the first place. Look at Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV). "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." That is one half of it. Then look in Leviticus 19:17,18 (NIV). "Do not hate your brother in your heart. . . But love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus made it no clearer than that in words, did He? He quoted that from Moses, right from the beginning.

But you cannot really command things like love, and not hating your brother in your heart, can you? When people are misbehaving, you may say so as an emergency measure. But that is all it is. It doesn't provide the lasting motivation that God desires. Then since even love is not clearly understood, (think how it has been grossly perverted through the years) Paul added 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 (RSV). "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right."

Imagine living in a community where everyone lives as described in the Ten Commandments. That means everybody loves God and everybody loves everybody else. That would mean that no one is ever rude or arrogant, or impatient. No one insists on having his own way. Can you imagine living in such a community? Would you be free? Then you go down to the details of the Decalogue. No one ever steals. No one ever kills. No one ever hates. No one ever lies. Everyone can be trusted and even more than that, look at number ten. People not only never do anything wrong, no one ever wants to. That is the meaning of number ten. This is the one that bothered Paul so much at first. He thought God was interfering too much when He got in that deep. Finally, Paul said that that is what really guarantees our freedom. We will live in a place where people not only never do anything wrong, they will never even want to. That means they have really been healed.

Even more than that, according to the first commandment, everyone loves and reveres the same God. What kind of a God do they worship and admire? Every member of God's family will admire the God who values nothing higher than the freedom of His children and who has paid such a price to prove it. They will worship a God who asks for nothing more than mutual love and trust. That produces a unity that is inherent in our faith and the fact that we all love and worship the same God. (see Eph. 4:20 NEB) When you have a group of people who live like that, you have real freedom, real peace, and real security. Seen in that light, the Decalogue, is a **guarantee** of freedom. For God says, "I will always run My universe this way. I would rather die than change it."

Some of us say, "God, please, do not change it. Please, always run Your universe in harmony with the principles of the Ten Commandments, or we won't be really safe and free." The only difference is that when the emergency is over, there will be no need for God to tell us to love each other, and tell us to be decent neighbors. The spirit of truth will have convinced us that it is only right and sensible to behave like that. That is the meaning of the law being written in our hearts, (see Jer. 31:33) where a man does his thinking (see Prov. 23:7). That means we have thought this through. We agree with God. That is the best way to live. That is the best way to run the universe. It is right. That means that our self-control has been restored. (Gal. 5:22,23)

There is just one commandment that doesn't seem to fit in. Can the seventh-day Sabbath be so regarded? Isn't it at least a restriction of our freedom? You remember our conversation entitled "The Reminder of the Evidence". If the Sabbath is a mere arbitrary test of our obedience, it doesn't fit into this picture, this good news, we have been talking about. But if the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind us of the truth, to remind us of the freedom in the Garden of Eden, to remind us how God set His people free from Egyptian bondage, and how Jesus died on crucifixion Friday, to set us free in that way more than any other, by telling us there was no need to be afraid of God, then keeping the seventh-day Sabbath does fit into this, for we need to be reminded of these truths that are the basis of our freedom. **God gave the Sabbath to help us, not to test our obedience.**

Look at Isaiah's understanding of the Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13 (NEB). "If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep My holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the sabbath a day of joy and the Lord's holy day a day to be honored, if you honor it by not plying your trade, nor seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord. . ." Joy is one of the gifts of the Spirit of truth. What truth is it we found that brings us such joy? The thing is, that if we are willing to take time as God has invited and asked us and urged us to do, to listen, and to remember, (think of all there is to remember that is represented by the Sabbath), then we will find the joy that comes from knowing this truth about our God. That is the kind of joy we shall live with for the rest of eternity. The Sabbath then *does* fit in.

If you were ever asked to explain why you obey God, assuming that you do, what answer would you give? Would you say, "**I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy.**" Is that why you don't lie and murder? Nothing wrong in those things themselves, but it upsets God when you do that, and that is a dangerous thing to do. This might be all right for a beginner or for a little child, but it makes God's laws seem so arbitrary. They have no sense in themselves. That kind of obedience does not speak well and truly about our God.

Would you rather say, "**I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him.**" Is that why you don't steal or commit adultery? It is not that you see anything wrong in these things in themselves, it is just that God doesn't like it when we do that. He has been so good to us, surely we owe it to Him to do the things He has asked us to do, whether they make sense or not. Again, this does not speak well of God. It might be a little improvement from obeying from fear or desire for reward. But it still smacks of arbitrariness. It still does not speak well of God. Although that is often thought to be the antidote for the first one.

Could you say this? **"I do what I do because more and more I am finding it to be right and sensible to do so. How I admire and revere the One who so advised me and even commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity". . . hastening to add, "Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to listen to this God and to heed His commandments when He asks me to do something beyond my present understanding."** That says that God is not arbitrary, but that everything He has asked us to do makes such good sense, we should want to do it anyway. If you can say that, then truly God's law is not a threat to your freedom, and you thank Him for it.

James is thought to be the legalist among the Bible writers. But look at James 2:8,12 (NIV). "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. . . . Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom." That is James; and even Luther didn't understand him that way.

I ventured to add this at the end. Since Ellen White, whom some of us regard as a real friend of God, has often been understood as a legalist, I included one of her many descriptions of real obedience. "The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely - because he is required to do so - will never enter into the joy of obedience. **He does not obey.** . . . True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right - because right doing is pleasing to God." *Christ's Object Lessons* pp. 97,98.

I understand that some day we will be able to stand in the presence of God and say: "God we would do all these things from here on, whether You ever ask us to or not, because we agree with You that they are sensible and they are right." God could say, "That is good. At last you are free. Now you have learned the truth and the truth will set and keep you free." (see Jn. 8:32)

Conversations About God - Tape 12B

Venden: Wednesday night, the night before last, a young man came up to me--I was out of town, another place; and he said to me, "I have tried for twenty-five years to live up to everything that the church has said that I ought to live up to." And he said, "I'm worn out." He said, "I don't feel any freedom or anything like that at all." I wish he could have been here tonight to hear your presentation.

But it seems to me that our subject tonight, folks, has touched on something that cuts across all denominational barriers. Because I had discussions with people of a variety of denominations. And it reaches home to me as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian as well; because I think some of our most persistent struggles have come right in this area.

Now I know you have a lot of questions there, that we haven't been able to cover up till now. And we're going to take a few of those.

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: And then we'll move to questions from the floor when you tell us, all right?

Maxwell: Unless there are a lot of urgent ones on the subject tonight; that's the main thing; I'd hate to miss those.

Venden: Well, let's start with that very thoughtful one there, and then let's see.

Maxwell: All right.

Maxwell: Here's one that came in awhile ago: "Did Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension demonstrate that any sinner who dies and is resurrected at the end of the millennium, could be redeemed if they really knew the loving character of the Father?"

Someone's thinking this through on paper. Do you understand the question? Well, it goes on: "If salvation were based upon performance, wouldn't that demand that Jesus ascend to Heaven without death - since He had done so very well - as a triumphant King? It seems His perfect life and death, as the chief of sinners, was not only to demonstrate victory over sin, but also of necessity to prepare Him for that moment as the worst of sinners; to die lost, and still see, even through the portals of the tomb, acceptance by the Father. Why? Because He knew the Father.

"While Jesus' greatest act of love is His death on the cross for all sinners, perhaps the Father's greatest act of love is to accept even the chief of sinners. Neither act of love is greater. The Father does love us as much as the Son."

Now, some questions come into that thought, and they are hard to read, because people would have to follow it through very carefully. Then I respond with my own thoughts and wonder what's most appropriate to say now.

The two things that come to my mind is: When Jesus died, did He know He would be accepted? I mean, could He see through the portals of the tomb? Did hope tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice? Or did He fear that sin was so offensive to God, their separation was to be eternal? But even so, where did He commit Himself? Even though He didn't know for sure, He said nevertheless, "Into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

My understanding of that is that even if I'm lost, the safest place to be is in the hands of God. Because I really believe the wicked have no need to be afraid of God. They will die, to be sure; He will sadly give them up, but not at His gracious hands. He will cry over them as they die. And that's why one could say, "I'm not entirely sure of the future, but one thing's sure: I'm never going to leave the hands of God. I wish to die in His hands." And you're safe there.

Because can any of us say, "I'm saved; I know it absolutely"? You see. But you can say that no matter what, that's where I want to be; that's where I want to stay. Oh, I have great hope, to be sure. He is infinitely gracious. And I know if He can possibly find that I would be safe to save, He will save me. I wonder if that's implicit in the question, that even though He was dying as the worst of sinners — was He not "made to be sin, though He knew no sin"? — He still said, "Into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

The first part, though, is interesting. If someone at the end of the millennium with a terrible record, when he's resurrected, could he still be redeemed if he came to know the loving character of the Father?

Of course, God won't make that mistake. Anyone who would respond favorably when he sees the New Jerusalem, and sees Christ, and sees all the rest of it, and says, "Oh, I like that; too bad it's too late." If he says, "Say, Lord, could you wait for me?" you don't think the Lord would stop everything? It's just that He won't make the mistake in diagnosis and resurrect him in the wrong resurrection. He'd be resurrected with the thief on the cross, wouldn't he?

So. Now, the one who asked this question; are you here tonight, this evening? So we could do justice with it. One thing I like about— Ellen White's suggests that "We would do well to spend an hour a day contemplating the cross." And when you contemplate, all kinds of thoughts like this go through your mind. I think one should do that, and think about the possible meanings, and then check them with the rest of Scripture. So that was a thoughtful question.

Here's quite a different one:

"In that the Seventh-day Adventists are not known for: kindness, love, longsuffering, friendship, trustworthiness, according to our Reader's Digest survey, etc., is that why the emphasis should be on the truth about God, because there isn't much good to say about us? And it is not our mission merely to gather individuals into a certain denominational polarization?"

Well, I would agree, the good news is about God. But couldn't there be a wee bit of good news about those who love, trust and admire God? Is it not a law we are supposed to become like the one we worship and admire? So we should be good news, too. We're rather qualified news, though. And the essence of the Good News is about God.

But there ought to be a little bit of good news. Shouldn't it appear beneficial to worship the true God? But it's a matter of emphasis. I do think that God's people can bear witness by the way they live, the fact they're being healed. We offer the Good News about God as Healer. And if we're not being healed, who's going to believe us?

They'll say, "Well, you don't seem very healed. How have you believed Him? Fifty years? Well, He's not a very good Physician, is He?"

So we should show some progress. So while it's true, we are not entirely good news, it doesn't mean there shouldn't be some good news forthcoming from the way we live and the way we behave. But I like the emphasis; the Good News is primarily about God.

Venden: Maybe what they're getting at there, though, is that we might not be the best ones to try to trumpet the good news about ourselves.

Maxwell: About ourselves, right.

Venden: Maybe we ought to concentrate on God.

Maxwell: I don't know who should do it. Even letters to Dear Abby didn't turn out too well for us, you remember, last time.

Maxwell: Yes. Oh, let's see, what else here in the list? Oh, one that provokes much debate:

"When Christ came to this world and took on human flesh, did He take on sinful flesh in essence or vicariously? Please explain the difference."

This is worth mentioning, because I think friendships have been lost over this, trying to decide whether He had sinful flesh or sinless flesh. Was He exactly like us? Some want Him to be like us, to show that if you do the right thing you can be saved from where we are. He came to show how you can live in the gutter and still get out.

See, we don't mind if He sinks to our level, because we're so reasonably good. But what about people who are much lower than we are? How about the drunk? the immoral person in the gutter? Does He sink to that level? We've wanted to make Him more and more like us.

I think the emphasis is, we want to be more and more like Him. And one big difference between Christ and us is, that He never had a bad habit. Because the only way you can have a bad habit, is to do something bad. Now, everybody agrees He never did anything bad. Isn't that true? Well then, He never had a bad habit.

Now which causes you more difficulty in life; the tendencies you've inherited from your dear parents, or the habits you have developed through the years? It seems to me, the habits we've developed. Jesus developed no bad habits. He never struggled with a bad habit.

Then let's not make Him like us too much. So I would say, He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. And it was quite enough to answer the questions and clarify everything that needed to be clarified. How much more do we want?

When He went up to Heaven, the angels said, "That's enough for us; that's clear." And down here we're still debating. That's why it's taken so long. The angels got it. By Sunday morning they were ready to receive Him and say, "It's all clear."

Then He came back to see if it was clear to us, and found the disciples in deep depression because it wasn't clear; and as theologians we're still debating what it is He's trying to clarify, let alone whether it's clear or not.

How patient the Lord has been with us down here. I think the only way to perceive the clarity of it, is to ask the right questions, the questions in the great controversy. He answered those. We want to add all kinds of other questions that are unnecessary. And we've talked about those questions during this Conversation series. There are only certain ones that needed to be answered.

Then you don't need to raise the question: "Well, how could He pay the price of sin by dying Friday and rising Sunday?" That's in the legal model. But it answered the questions; they were all answered by Friday afternoon. He could have gone to Heaven then as far as that's concerned.

But to add more meaning to the Sabbath, He rested over the Sabbath. The universe watched, reflected, celebrated, and prepared to tell Him on Sunday, "It's absolutely clear; all the charges are false."

But we want to add all kinds of other things because of our preoccupation with our legal standing. I think that's the main reason. And so we've made it more complicated, I think, than it needs to be.

"He took on the likeness of sinful flesh," is what it says in Romans 8. And that's enough. God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, to do away with sin; to deal with sin. And He dealt

with it.

There's another one: what happened to Jesus' divinity during His earthly existence? Paul says, "He emptied Himself." I don't know how you do that. I don't know how He combined the two in the first place. He just didn't use His power. He had it, and he was tempted to use it to defend Himself; and He wouldn't.

And that adds a great deal to it, to me, that He really knew He had the power. He says, "No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down of Myself. I take it up again of Myself. No one's killing Me. I'm going through this as God in human form, to answer the questions." And He knew when He'd answered them, because He said: "It's finished." Not half finished. It's really done.

How He combined the two, I don't know. But it adds a lot to me to realize that the One who had the power, would not use it to persuade. Nor would He use it to blot out His tormentors. And had He done both in the end when He had hardly any followers - they despised Him as weak - and when He was being so brutally tormented, if He had just used His power and wiped them out, He'd have had thousands of followers. That's the kind of leader they were looking for.

But He would not use His power for that purpose. And that speaks very well of God. Talk about self control! You know, when a little man is facing a big man and he behaves himself, that's not self control, that's just prudent. But when a man who has enormous power is facing a little guy, and he doesn't beat up on him, that's self control! And when God in human form did not use His power as He so readily could have, that shows real self control. And He wouldn't do it.

What was the nature of His humanity? Well, He was enough like us to make the point clear. That's enough, isn't it? He was able to die. And He really died, which is a human mortal thing to do. And He didn't use any power not available to us, to do the things that He did, and to resist sin.

As a child was Jesus in communication with God? We don't have any information on that, do we? He communed with God through the study of the Scriptures which is available to us. I really believe He learned about His Father from the Old Testament. Which means the Old Testament is that clear. And you know how we run through it from time to time. I think the picture of God in the Old Testament is magnificent.

Then of course, He was treated like a prophet. God would communicate with Him, and sometimes He could read people's thoughts, you remember? He read Simon's thoughts. We'll mention that next Friday night in our discussion.

Why was His life on earth limited to 33 years? He really only exposed Himself to the public for three and a half years. The amazing thing is that He lasted that long. At the hands of those devout Sabbathkeepers, it's amazing He lasted so long. See, nothing is more threatening than to suggest people are theologically in error. That brings the very devil out of people. And to tell them that they were wrong on those matters— oh, they were infuriated, you see.

Well, I don't know whether to tell this. But the things we've been talking about these twelve times, and eight more to go - you must know in some places this is not appreciated at all. In fact, the thought that God has not said, "Love me, or I'll kill you," has - ah, I hesitate to say - I've had the experience of this stirring people mightily.

And they'll say, "Look, if God didn't say that, He'll never have order in His universe. What will it do to the young people if they don't know that God has said, 'Love Me, or I'll kill you?'" Of course, they don't like to phrase it that way. They use euphemisms and long phrases, because "Love me or I'll kill you" is just too, too much.

But in essence, the basis of the legal, judicial, forensic view, is the belief that God has to exterminate the people who do not obey Him, that is, love Him. Which is saying, "You either love me, or I'll have to kill you. Otherwise you're free."

And Ellen White says that destroys human intellect, human reason! It makes no sense. You cannot demand or enforce love under threat of execution. Especially if we include a little torture before you die. It makes it even worse. And yet with so many people, that is essential. You must have that, for there to be order in the universe. What you've got is a tired, old, fatherly God who's sentimental and won't go through with this thing.

God says, "I will run My universe without fear. I will run My universe in a humble-minded way." And that's why He said, "Blessed are the meek." Because only meek people are really impressed by that. And the meek will inherit the earth, and God will never have to raise His voice again.

Well, will babies and young children who die be lost? We couldn't guarantee that for anyone. I just love the indications that we have. Ellen White, you know, mentions babies being brought to their mothers' arms; but I wondered about babies whose mothers don't make it. And so two places she mentions she saw angels gathering little orphans, you know. That's in there, in Selected Messages. Just little hints. You wouldn't have to know that.

My response would be: As we know God, do you think He won't save anybody who'd be safe to save? You could count on Him to do that. If it would make sense to save anybody any age, any condition, He would do it. So we could count on that without having to know.

One reason for believing we don't have to know, is the answer to the Pharisees who said, "Whose wife will this girl be who married the seven brothers?" He said, "You don't even need to raise the question. You're going to be like the angels in the hereafter. Just don't worry about it."

So I would say not to worry about this. But don't think that in the hereafter we'll always feel sad because God didn't do the generous thing. He will do that for sure.

Well, let's see, any others on here, or should we go to live questions right away?

Venden: Well, why don't you take one more; and then you be framing your questions, and we'll watch, and raise your hand, and try to make sure everyone gets in.

Maxwell: Here's one. "In the middle of the Garden were the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. One tree or two trees? That's an interesting question. That is, it's an interesting question, that it is a question.

Yeah, there were two trees, I believe. Now, perhaps that arose from the picture of the Tree of Life in the hereafter, with a trunk on either side of the river. You know the picture that we have. No, I judge there were two trees, by all means. What's interesting is they were so close together. They couldn't go to the Tree of Life without seeing the other one. God did not hide the tree where the devil could approach them in a dark corner of the Garden. He put it right there where they'd see it. But He advised them not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. And Eve was careless, and sure enough she wasn't ready. But that tree was not a test of obedience. It was there to protect them.

Comment: I know you've addressed the issue of the Sabbath several times, and how it's not a threat to our freedom; but I still have a lingering question about it. We hear a lot of stories about people who before they become Christians, maybe they work on Sabbath. And when they become a Christian, and they feel like they need to quit their job, and they need to put their family at a big disadvantage, because they need to keep the Sabbath all of a sudden. And it

seems like God would not ask us to do something like that. It seems arbitrary in that respect.

Maxwell: Unless it were extremely beneficial.

Comment: Yeah, and I don't see why it would need to be that day. Why couldn't it be the next day?

Maxwell: Well, if it's just a test of obedience, it could be any day. It wouldn't make a fig of difference. But because it's tied to certain historic events, that's what makes the difference. And it is significant that those who worship on another day, attach quite different meanings to that other day; important meanings, to be sure.

I think it would be a very good thing if every Sunday we remembered, This is the day Christ rose; and if Christ be not risen, we are of all men most miserable. Sometimes we are afraid, almost, to worship on Sunday lest it seem we're not keeping the right Sabbath. No, Easter reflects on the Resurrection Sunday. We should celebrate; most important. Why not on Friday celebrate the crucifixion? Like the old Armistice Day in days gone by. We had two minutes of silence, I remember in public school; we never missed that in England. So many of the boys in my school had died in World War I.

Then why not Thursday evening— celebrate?

Comment: World War I?

Maxwell: Yes, they were on the list. See, I left England before World War II. Here it was World War I.

Comment: I thought you meant your classmates . . . [Laughter]

Maxwell: No, I left before they [several unintelligible words]. It's not that bad! I didn't say the Civil War. This was England too, you know. [Laughter] No, every morning when we met for worship in this public school in England, there was a list - tremendous list - of names. This was an all boys school from first grade through junior college. So the older ones were old enough to fight and die. So many of the students in that school I attended, had died in World War I in the trenches in Europe. And every Armistice Day we honored them very soberly; because we had worship every morning in public school. Church of England, you know. So.

But then Thursday night, wouldn't it be good Thursday evening to have Communion? Now, we're going to have it here tomorrow. In a way, it's more correct to have it in the evening, have it Thursday evening, and remember. You know, it's like having your anniversary on some other day. You know, you try this on your wife: "I'm busy next Wednesday. Couldn't we put it off for a couple of weeks?"

She says, "Is that all it means to you?" I mean, you can start a lot of trouble in that way. [Apparently, a member of the audience said he had done that.] [Laughter] You have?

Comment: I can't go wrong[?] if you have a good relationship. And if my relationship to God is good, I don't see why He would require it, if it meant my having to give up my job; or in the end of time, having to give up your life.

Maxwell: Well, actually He wouldn't insist you give up anything. He will say, "I offer you something." And I know it seems arbitrary; and so this week when I was working along-- sometimes when you're doing other things, thoughts come to mind best--I was thinking, Supposing you had been present at the end of Creation Week. And the Bible says, "On the seventh day, God celebrated the seventh day." That was not ours; it was our second day. And so in a way we were not included as the universe was. And so I see God and the angels having

a tremendous celebration over what had been revealed that week - about freedom, and the falsity of Satan's charges, and the beauty of it all, and His generosity in sharing His creative power with us, and all those wonderful things.

And so I'm watching. And I say, "I see you're having a meeting here. It looks awfully good. What are you having it for?" And they explain. Well say, "I like that! I like what it stands for. I mean, could I possibly join in?"

"Well, you don't have to."

"I'd like to." And so you keep your first Sabbath voluntarily.

Then on the Sabbath after Crucifixion Friday, and you see the whole universe pausing; silence through the universe, as they wait for Christ to return. And in that silence, they reflect on what He revealed on Crucifixion Friday.

And you're an observer and say, "What are you all doing now? What are you all thinking about? Looks like its a very special time for you."

"Yes; we're thinking that it's finished. We have the answers to all the questions, and we're marveling at what it cost."

"Well, what is this all about?" And they tell you. You say, "Oh, I love that too. Could I join with you?"

"Well you don't have to if you don't want to. I mean, it is the seventh day. We wouldn't want to impose this on you."

And then if you should be in the New Earth when God and His followers celebrate the re-creation of all things, that would be the most rousing Sabbath celebration in the history of the universe. They'll be having a marvelous time. Think of all there will be to remember the first Sabbath in the New Earth.

You say, "Oh, that looks marvelous. Could I join in with you?"

"Well, we hate to suggest it, cause you always feel it's such a requirement and a burden; but I mean, if you'd like to."

You say, "I would love to. Please, may I?"

I think the Sabbath is a gift. And it has been destroyed as a legalistic test of our obedience. We need it. We need to be reminded. It's a privilege to join in.

Have you ever been outside when there's a big celebration inside? You know, I'd love to be in celebrating with the rest. I think we will want to keep Sabbath in the New Earth. And that can begin right now. I want to celebrate every seventh day what that day stands for. And it's tied historically, it's the seventh day of the week each time through history. The burden would have to rest on one who claimed that it could just as well be some other time.

And I think God would say, "If you really feel strongly that way, okay; but it's a little hazardous. Most people who do that, begin to forget the meaning, and they pick up other ideas." And that really is the history of Christianity. The substitution of another day has meant substitution of other answers to the questions in the great controversy.

So the idea that it really is a gift. I especially want to emphasize this when we come to the subject of perfection near the end. Now there's a load to lay on us! You know, you've also got to be perfect. No, to me perfection is not a requirement. Perfection is an offer. Actually, healing is an offer. Salvation is an offer. Sabbathkeeping is an offer.

You say, "Well why, God, did you lay it on us so heavily?"

"Well, yes, when you were children, I did say you have to go upstairs and brush your teeth. But now you've grown up, I won't do it anymore." As Dr. Gene Rathbun says, "You only have to floss the teeth you want to keep." You know.

And I think that's what God says about these matters. Because as adults He cannot force us to do a single one of these things. You can't force people to enjoy the Sabbath; love anybody; to trust anybody. It cannot be legislated. But as children, to protect them, you do seem to suggest they can be legislated. And we all try with our little ones, to protect them. But sometimes we hang onto them; when they're 65 we're still trying to do it. God says, "I quit long before that. Why are you trying to do it as a church?" And so we really have to set our people free.

Some say, "Well, not many will stay by." That's an awful thing, if true. But that means their staying by isn't worth much anyway. I believe it's those who stay by in the highest sense of freedom that really make up the core of what we call the church. They really want to be there. It's very voluntary; it's not something required.

It's the devil who has made this all such a legalistic, burdensome thing. What do you think about it yourself? Apart from the meaning, I couldn't say this; it's the meaning.

Comment: And I can see where a person would really want— you would really want to do it on the day that God rested. You would want to do it in the day that the universe was observing, thinking about these things. But if the circumstances were really hard on you, couldn't you— you would want to do it, but wouldn't it be more prudent, and wouldn't it be. . .? It just seems like it would be wiser to do it on another day, as long as you could meet with God and think about these things any other time.

Maxwell: Well, if you need a certain specific medication, and you say, "God, I really can't take that one. Couldn't I use this other?"

Comment: People that— say, you're allergic to penicillin. And you say, "No, penicillin is the best for it."

"Well, yeah it is; but I'm allergic to it. Don't you have something else."

Maxwell: Well, if that's true, Sabbathkeeping would be truly harmful to you. [Laughter] You know. That would be the thing.

Comment: If you have something really special that you want to do, you don't care what your job is. You say, "I'm going. I don't care what you say." And if we're that eager about the Sabbath, we're going to do that too. That's what it amounts to.

Maxwell: It really depends how much it means to one. And you can't really force people to make it that significant. What you can do, is force people to stop working from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. You can do that. But it isn't worth much.

Comment: You can just hope that they understand it.

Maxwell: It may lead them to hate God. And that's why they were able to hate and crucify Christ, and rush home to keep Saturday from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. That's the most insane thing that happened in the history of the universe. And that's what keeping the Sabbath as a burden can do to us.

Now, the only people on this planet who would be in the greatest danger of making the same mistake, would be people like them. That is, people who are seventh day Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-studying Adventists. Which they were.

So our church, because of its cardinal beliefs, is in the greatest danger of making the same mistake that the unbelievers made in the very presence of Christ. We could do it. And that's why, to avoid their mistake, we mustn't settle for rote, unthinking, merely memorized worship. All our worship should be very, very thoughtful. Because that's the mistake they made was, they never worried about the meaning. They just did it.

A little Boy of twelve stood among them one day and said, "Why are you doing all these things?" "Oh," they said, "because God has said it and we believe it and that's all there is to it." They couldn't tell Him.

And that's why I think we should turn our children loose. They're uninhibited, you know. And they'll ask you, "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?"

It's such fun when we turn them loose. Especially at Communion. "How come you have just a little tiny drink?" You know. Well, I remember my grandma in England when she was very old. She would always be so careful to get every little drop out. And I'd say, "Why are you so careful to get every little drop out?"

"Well," she says, "the text says, 'Drink ye all of it.'" You know. And she was very concerned. So I lived with that for awhile until I learned some Greek. And actually, the "all" belongs with "you," not the drink. It's a very generous thing. It's, "All of you drink it." It's open Communion. "All of you drink it." Oh, I was very relieved. Grandma died without knowing that.

But little children can ask these things; and it's such fun to do. I think we should turn the children loose. In the new Bible books, the writers have really tried to turn them loose. "Why doesn't the king have anything on?" That needs to be asked of many heavy theological ideas. Because they don't bear up under investigation.

Like, "How come Jesus has to plead with the Father?" as my youngest, Alice, asked when she was only six. "Doesn't God love us as much as Jesus does?" That was her question.

And yet we will say the Father has to be interceded with. Of course, as we discussed a few times ago, Jesus said, "There is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you; for the Father loves you Himself."

But we insist on saying, "He must be up there interceding, or we wouldn't be safe." We're turning down the most wonderful thing He said. The Father loves us as much as the Son.

And it may take little children to break it loose from that by saying, "Does that mean the Father doesn't love us as much as the Son?" So I have a whole collection of questions that little children asked. They're among the best. And let's invite them to do it. That makes worship very interesting, when they're free to do it.

Ask them, "Why did Jesus have to die?" And after awhile they will sense what we're implying; He had to die so that the Father could forgive. "You mean the Father wouldn't forgive us without that?"

That doesn't sound like the father of the prodigal son, does it? Is God different from the father of the prodigal son? Children can handle that. And you say, "Oh no, oh no, oh no."

Well, it surely does sound like it. So then you start preparing more carefully for worship with the little ones. And eventually you decide, "I think worships like that take too long. I think it's better just to read the lesson and then have prayer and move on. This discussion is a hazardous thing."

I think it's better to turn the children loose and let them really ask: Did God ever say, "You either

love Me, or I'll kill you?" That is inconceivable! And yet that is fundamental to the legalistic view of the plan of salvation. Oh yes, your question.

Comment: I think that the main thing we have to understand is God's love, not the Sabbath. If we love God, we will want to please Him. And He has said many times, that if we will do as He asks, He will pour us out blessings that we can't even conceive how much He'll do for us. I think this is the thing. God will never do anything to hurt us, because we do what He asks us to do. See, and I think this is what we have to realize. Because it's insignificant about the Sabbath, or, you know, adultery, and all the other Commandments. The main key still is, do we love God? Do we want to please God? And if we really do, then we will do as God asks us, knowing that He loves us and He'd never do anything that hurts.

Maxwell: Now, so long as that wouldn't deprive one of the real significance of the Sabbath. It would be like Obedience 1, 2 and 3: At the beginning, a person may say, "I keep Sabbath because God has told me to; and He has the power to reward and destroy." That might at least get you to church to hear better reasons, you know; so God has used that at times.

So then you say, "I do what I do" — that is, "I'm keeping seventh-day Sabbath this week, because God has told me to; and I love Him and want to please Him. Now I don't know why He picked the seventh day. It does seem a little arbitrary, but that's no business of mine. I love Him and I want to please Him. It upsets Him when I don't come to church on Sabbath, and so I'm coming."

I think then one could go to the third, where you say: "I'm keeping Sabbath, because now after all these years, I've found so many reasons for doing it. I wouldn't want to waste this day. This day was made for me, with all the significance all through history. And now I keep it in the highest sense of freedom. Not just because He's asked me to, but He said, 'You know, you really need this day. You need to be reminded.' So now I'm keeping it in the highest sense of freedom. In fact, I'd go on doing it anyway. It's now my anniversary of these things, you know. I like the thought.

If He'd never asked us to keep Sabbath, might we not have come up with the idea? Why don't we celebrate the birthday of the world, the time that He rescued the Egyptians from bondage - that's mentioned in scripture, and the day after the Crucifixion? I mean, we might even have thought of that ourselves because it is so significant. Well, we memorialize other things, don't we? We celebrate much lesser events than that. The most important events in history, are all connected with the seventh day of the week. We might have picked it ourselves. The church council might have come up with it. The Dallas Statement might have said, "We'll start it from here on. We'll start keeping the seventh day," without ever having a commandment to do it.

Now, God gave it to us when we weren't that knowledgeable. He said, "Start right now; I say, I want you"— just as you said. "Do you trust Me enough to do this thing? You need it. And the longer you live, the more you'll find how much you need it and what its meaning is."

And isn't that the way— the orders that we give to children? Like, "Brush your teeth. I can't tell you why. I can't explain about gums and teeth and all the rest. But just do it. Trust me; do it." Then later on you learn all the reasons. Maybe you wind up a dentist, specializing in periodontics, and you realize how important it is to do this. Dr. Rathbun doesn't need anybody to tell him to floss his teeth. I mean, he wished he'd flossed them even better. I surely do. Now he tries to look after me at this stage. It makes such good sense. I listen to him and obey his recommendations in the highest sense of freedom. He can tell me all he wants. I'd benefit from his advice. And that goes for everything else that it makes sense. It's worth doing, and you can do it freely. And I think the Sabbath can be approached the same way.

Comment: . . . "unless you start keeping it, you'll never know" . . .

Maxwell: That's true; you might start. It gets you to church, and you find the reasons; that's true. So we often start a bit legalistically, don't we? But then if we stay that way, we're just losing the meaning, and we're losing most of the benefit if we do that.

Venden: Alright, we had a question right over here.

Comment: Your English school— maybe they taught you something about the word "holy," because I've heard[?] a lot of questions about in our word "holiday." And we have secular holidays. I wonder if our government who makes those days holy - like Washington's birthday, Lincoln's birthday, and so forth - do they make themselves holy when they do that? Or do they make - are we holy when we keep those?

Maxwell: You mean, what makes a holiday a holy day?

Comment: Yes. Well the Commandment is, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Maxwell: I don't think it's intrinsic in the day, or intrinsic in the time; it's intrinsic in the meaning. That's the thing. And that's why some holidays can be secular; and some can be sacred, and they're no longer holy days. It all depends what you're celebrating. Valentine's Day is a holiday, but hardly holy.

Comment: Well, I think Valentine's Day isn't a holiday from - by our legislature. I don't think there's any -- I think it's Lincoln and Washington and a few others; but not Valentine's Day. Now, what does "holiday" mean?

Maxwell: Well, in the beginning, it was more a holy day; a very special day. We use that, like many other words, at a point somewhat removed from its original significance, you see.

Comment: . . . one final question, then. "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." Was it holy because God made it holy? Or . . .

Maxwell: Alright, it's holy because of the One we think about on that day. That's what makes it holy. And that's why some might observe Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown; and it's not been holy at all the whole time. They just didn't work.

But the one who has thought about, the infinitely Holy One, has kept the Sabbath as a holy day. What makes the difference is the meaning. And in this case, it's the Person behind it, and the truth about that Person that is celebrated on that day. That makes them holy, very special, very sacred thoughts of infinite, eternal meaning. Makes it very special, like no other holy day that you could think of, it seems to me.

And God went out of His way when He did the next most important act of revelation and demonstration. He connects it with the Sabbath. Most significant, how often He's done that, in order not have too many of these days; or we'd never get any work done.

So having set aside the seventh day at the end of Creation Week, all the other major events - so many of them - He connected with the same seventh day. So its meaning accumulates as you go on through scripture. And then in the New Earth, again it's Sabbath, as we'll celebrate the finishing of everything. The meaning will accumulate and accumulate— a very special day.

Venden: All right, we have one over here.

Comment: What does it mean that He hallowed it and blessed the Sabbath Day? What does

that mean?

Maxwell: Well, He said, "This is a sacred, special day." But some, you see— we can become a little mystical here and say that the 24 hours from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, there's something different about the sixty minutes in each hour, and all the rest. No, you breathe the same, and eat the same. I mean, it's the same kind of time. Or you'd have trouble when you cross the Date Line, or they move the Date Line from time to time.

I don't think there's anything sacred about the time. What's sacred is the meaning. No, what's sacred really is the Person, and the meaning of what He's done. It really goes back to the Person.

Comment: You don't think we'll have any more special blessings on this day?

Maxwell: Not intrinsic in the time. I don't think so. I don't know what that would mean.

Venden: You mean, just because of the time, are you saying, because of that particular slot of time?

Comment: No, because of the day; that the Lord set it apart, and He blessed it and hallowed it; and that you will receive, by keeping it, greater revelation from Him.

Maxwell: Yes, if you study, if you think, if you reflect, if you commune with Him. But not just because you keep the day. Like, if you go to church and just sit there, there's no particular benefit. But if you're thinking while you're there and something's happening, then you're benefitted.

The mere mechanical, you see, performance of this thing in itself, is not beneficial. In fact, it's actually harmful. The Jews proved that in ancient times; that the mere observance of the sacred hours of the day — that's all they offered; they didn't work; they worshiped, to be sure, but [with] a wrong picture of God. And they hated Christ when He came. Think how many Sabbaths they had kept. Right time, correct day; and yet the way they kept the Sabbath turned them against God rather than toward Him. Because they had the wrong thought from the day. They kept it for the wrong reason. And none have kept it so carefully as they have. Look at all the rules they have for Sabbath-keeping.

Comment: Well, I [. . .]keeping, though. [could not understand her comment. Perhaps she's saying that they weren't really keeping the Sabbath.]

Maxwell: You could use "keeping," if you prefer.

Venden: I have the uneasy feeling here, Dr. Maxwell, that you're going past each other. I hear our sister saying that she feels that keeping the Sabbath is a very important thing. And I hear you saying yes, it is, if you understand its meaning. If you just stop work for those 24 hours, it's meaningless. And I'm not sure that she is getting the message. I'm just a little bit uncertain there. Am I right on that?

Comment: Well, it depends on what you think. But I've that the Sabbath was a very special day. Now, I think you're. . .

Venden: And Dr. Maxwell is saying it's a very special day too. He's not saying it isn't.

Comment: Some of your colleagues think that there are very special blessing poured out on this day [. . .] messages by [?]

Venden: Special blessings poured out on that day, but I think Dr. Maxwell is saying, Not just because of those hours, but only in relationship and in understanding of the day. Are you

comfortable with that?

Comment: No.

Maxwell: Say more.

C: It says in the Spirit of Prophecy that God's Presence is especially in that day.

C: But His Presence isn't there if you aren't looking for it.

Maxwell: Or if He's there and you're not paying attention, it won't do you any good.

Venden: That's right.

Maxwell: I mean, God was present in Palestine.

Comment: That's not God's fault.

Maxwell: No, that's right. But there's nothing different about the time. Time is time; an hour, after an hour, after an hour. When you come to the hours of the Sabbath, it's the same time. But when you think of the meaning of the day, then you are open to the instruction and the blessing that God is best able to give on that day because we take the time to listen. When we turn aside from our "busy-ness."

Like that quotation I've given out— three of the translations of Isaiah. "If on Sabbath you don't pursue your own affairs, you don't do your own business" - not your own pleasure; that's what started the Dear Abby thing, which is a great mistake. It's not pursuing gain, worldly gain, on the Sabbath. "Not engaging in idle talk or gossip on the Sabbath," is one of the translations.

In other words, it's a very special day when your thoughts are not oriented toward yourself and the failures of others. You're going to think about God and what He's done. And God can more greatly bless us that day.

It's like John being "the beloved disciple." Jesus loved them all, but He was able to show more love to John because he was always close; he was always there. That would be the same as the Sabbath. If we come on the Sabbath Day, and we're attentive, and we seek His blessing, it will be there.

Venden: All right, this young man has been very patient.

Comment: I just want to address the question that this man had back here, of the prudence or the logic of keeping Sabbath at the expense of losing your job. I just wanted to pose the question: What would have happened to history if Martin Luther had questioned his prudence or his logic of posting the theses on the chapel, or the church? And he - it was very crucial, because he was playing with his own life. I mean, he did this at the expense of his own life. So, you know, the question: Is it worth not only giving up your job; but it's a question of - more importantly - is it worth giving up your life for the Sabbath? Now, when you see anything it is worth anything. . . .

Maxwell: . . . if one sees it to be that important. And the same way with Luther. They do say now that maybe he never did post the theses, you know; and he never said, "He I take my stand"; and now we know for sure that George Washington never cut down the cherry tree. All these things are going. That's true, isn't it? I read it during these Lutheran celebrations. The thing is, Luther knew he took a stand for God and for the scriptures that risked his life because he believed it was worth doing. He counted the cost and went ahead anyway. Your point is absolutely valid anyway.

Now, Is the Sabbath that important? would be the question. And I think, in a way, that's up to us.

Do you find the Sabbath that important? If you keep it not because it's important, because God said so, one is barely beginning. Later on, if you keep it because it has such significance, then it's a much more rewarding experience; and there's more blessing in the day, I would say, in that case.

Comment: As a consequence, though, the Reformation happened, and it took place, and we've evolved to this time, and Protestant has become something valued.

Maxwell: We're glad he was willing to take that stand at such risk. Is Sabbath-keeping that significant? Would you stake your life on it? Not on the day, but on the meaning of the day? That would be something else. Those who see it as an arbitrary test of obedience, will find it more difficult in the end. "I'm going to do it. I don't know why, except I've got to prove."

You see, if you look on the Sabbath as an arbitrary test of obedience, what our Sabbath-keeping proves primarily, is that we're the good people. See, we're the ones who pass the test of obedience. And then the Sabbath is seen primarily as saying something about us. We keep the Sabbath to show we are the ones who obey. Whereas the Sabbath is primarily about God. So that's the difference. If it's just a test of obedience, it loses and can do great damage, I believe. It's much more than that.

Venden: This gentleman over here by the wall.

Comment: I just had a comment. I've been a legalist most of my life, and thought God was a legalist too. And on several occasions. . .

Maxwell: They go together; that's right.

Comment: On several occasions I've been in a position where I might lose my job over the Sabbath. And it's never happened; I've never lost my job. I had several friends that I think were pretty much legalists who were in the same positions; they have never lost their job. Now, it seems to me that God goes along and helps those people, hoping that someday they're going to see that He isn't a legalist.

Maxwell: Oh yeah, I think if we're offering Obedience #1, you know God honors that. That's the foot of Sinai. That's the place to start. Let's not make light of that. It's that we should go on to #2 and on to #3 as we mature and grow up. But God's blessing begins from the very beginning.

It's like taking medication. You don't know why, but you trust your doctor and you faithfully take it. Later on you may learn a lot more about it.

Comment: Don't be afraid that if you go ahead and keep the Sabbath, that God isn't going to take care of you; because He is.

Maxwell: It's just that way down the line, you might be so settled into the truth about God, that He'd allow you to be tested to the limit like Job. And Job was absolutely true to God, and lost everything.

See, there was a case: He paid his tithe, and the windows of heaven were not open. He prayed for his boys and girls, and he lost them all. He prayed for health, and he lost it. He lost everything. And the theologians came to explain, legalistically.

And Job says, "I believe you're wrong. That's not true about God. I can't explain this, but I will not allow your explanation." And eventually God stepped in and said, "Job, you're absolutely right."

But most of us are not ready to go through what Job did. But I'm afraid we'd have to be prepared in the end to take a stand; and apparently God at that time not reward it, and not look

after us. But we'll trust Him anyway through the Time of Trouble.

Now when we're children and beginners, God is quick with the rescue and quick with the blessing. That's the whole basis for Bedtime Stories. In Bedtime Stories, you know, the family runs out of food, and they all kneel to pray; and they've hardly said Amen, and someone knocks on the door with a food basket. That's the way it has to be with children. That's what Bedtime Stories are for.

Job is not a bedtime story. Job ran out of food, and he prayed in faith; and nobody knocked on the door. And he trusted God anyway, because he knew God, and he knew that God was trustworthy. God doesn't ask little children to wait, and wait, and wait like that, you know.

So if we have really grown up in the end, I think we should anticipate going through experiences like Job, when the heavens will seem as brass above us, and God is not listening, not protecting, not rewarding our faith. Then we will trust Him solely on the basis of His being so trustworthy, and not because if you trust Him, you'll get rewarded all the time. You may have to wait awhile. That's for grownups, though.

Those stories never even make the Review Answers to Prayer column. Usually the Answers to Prayer column is: We got into trouble, and we prayed for help, and God looked after us. I mean, it wouldn't make headlines in the Review. Was it this family got into trouble, prayed for help; it never came. But they still trust God. Put that in the Review very frequently.

But that's the book of Job, and that's why the book of Job isn't used very much. In fact, that's why in a Quarterly not too long ago, the book of Job was a description - the way it was presented in the thirteen lessons - of Job's failures, of which he surely did need to repent. And the Quarterly left out the last page which says, "Job, you did splendidly; you have said of Me what is right," because it didn't fit the presentation. It was really left out. Yes, it was sad that it was.

But who knows where the ones who prepared the Quarterly are. You know, we're all at different levels. Somewhere between Mt. Sinai and the mouth of the cave. Someday we all should be at the mouth of the cave, where just the still, small voice is enough; and we trust God because He's trustworthy.

Anybody here want to stand up and say: "I'm ready, bring it on, Lord." I doubt it.

Comment: The Commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." What makes the day holy? When Moses was in the desert he was asked to put his shoes off because the place where he stands was holy ground. Well, what made the ground holy?

Maxwell: Ah, God was there!

Venden: The presence of God. Not is the presence of God in the seventh day, or is it not? Or can man make a day holy as we have in the first day of the week observance by the Papacy?

Maxwell: Well, an interesting question on that is, Have you ever met on a Tuesday afternoon and had an absolutely inspiring time together? And you said, "Surely the Lord was in this place." That can happen at any time. But there's something special about the Sabbath every week because of the meanings God has assigned to it. And He didn't do it arbitrarily. It's because He connected it with history. I think it is the meaning of the day that brings to mind the presence of our God all seven days of the week.

You know, the Jews did a good thing. They rated every day with respect to the Sabbath. The first day from the Sabbath; the second day from the Sabbath; and so on; then the preparation day for the Sabbath. God was in the whole week; but the Sabbath lent special meaning to the

whole week. God is in every day in the week. But because He said, "Please turn aside, take time, remember," then in that sense, in a very real sense, He can be more available to us in the Sabbath, it seems to me. It isn't He says, "I will come to Loma Linda more on Sabbath than on any other day." What do you think?

Comment: He is there when we come to an appointment that He has made. He has made this appointment, and we recognize that appointment; and we come there, and He is there to mete the blessing to us that He sees we're in need of.

So I feel that the day being holy, and it's an appointment that He's made, that no other time has the same sacredness as the seventh day. Otherwise we could have a man-made day of worship, whether it's Sunday or any other day of the week. But when God says the seventh day is the Sabbath, then it means that His presence is there to meet with His people wherever they meet -- one or two, or a congregation.

Maxwell: But he's not there other times?

Comment: In that particular sense, He's with you at the home, He's with you at your work, He's with you on the highway, He's with you everywhere you go, all week long. But for a special day of meeting to worship, why do we worship?

Maxwell: Do you worship on Monday? Tuesday?

Comment: That's right.

Maxwell: You worship every day.

Comment: There's a congregational meeting, and there's a home worship every day. But the point is that— is God giving us the freedom to make a choice of which day is holy, whether He regards it so or no?

Maxwell: Well, are we free to choose when Creation Week ended? I mean, that's just the way it is. I think God would like to get all arbitrariness out of the seventh day. The world has paid a very heavy price for allowing any arbitrariness to be there. It even led a group of people, who really seemed to observe the day, to nail Him to the cross, and run home to keep that day holy -- to prove they were God's true people.

And we must, as the end approaches, get the arbitrariness out of it. It is a day of enormous significance and meaning, tied to the greatest events of Revelation and the great controversy. That's what makes it so significant. And that's why when sun sets on Friday, we say, "God, this is the time when You did those things. And I'm going to think about You; but I'm going to think about You with respect to the things that You did. This is how I know what You're like."

And that's what makes the day so special. You can't have God here a little less one day than another. I mean, God is either with us, or He isn't. The Holy Spirit is either with us, or He isn't. He's a person. You don't have God's hand here on Wednesday, but the all of God on Sabbath. I mean, He's here, or He isn't. I hope He's in that hospital seven days a week with the people - very close to them. He's here all the time.

But there's only one day that carries all those meanings in the Great Controversy. And that's what makes it a unique day that cannot be duplicated. There is no other day that has those meanings. Use another one; it will not have those meanings. I mean, you actually cannot assign those meanings to another day; because they are connected with historical events.

Comment: As a child I was raised in the Nazarene Church; I therefore worship on Sunday.

Maxwell: You had a very conservative, Biblical life; yes.

Comment: When I came to school here and sat through religion classes, I felt as though I was bad, because I worshipped on Sunday. How does the Adventist Church tolerate those of us who do not worship on your Sabbath? Are we respected?

Maxwell: Anybody who made you feel uncomfortable, ought to be spanked. That's terrible! Because the Lord wouldn't do it. No, that's a terrible thing. God will save all who trust Him. And some of His most trusting friends worship on some other day. Some of His worst enemies worshipped on the seventh day. The people who nailed Him on the cross and said He had a devil, kept the seventh day Sabbath.

So, who's authorized to speak for our church in this matter? You know, Ellen White has had such an influence on our church, it would be fair to ask her. And she's very clear on this matter. She says, "The majority of God's people are yet in the other communions." So we should be very, very respectful. See, you might be having a much better experience with God in your Sunday-keeping, than I would be having in my seventh-day Sabbathkeeping. And the history of the Jews proves that.

However, if I'm strongly convinced about the benefits of the Sabbath, I might where it's appropriate, with all due respect and patience, want to suggest there's something you'd love to see. You know, we have the privilege of bearing Good News to share with each other.

But I'd have to be convinced it's really worth doing. Otherwise, you have this problem: that in the hereafter the Lord will be faced with all His children. And He'll look toward one group of the nicest people that have ever lived -- people like you. And He'll say, "You know, angels and all the rest of us, I want you to look at this group. They are loving; they're sincere; they'd fit in beautifully. They're just the kind of people you'd love to live next door to.

"But it's too bad. They didn't keep the Sabbath. They're out. They worshiped Me, to be sure; but they worshiped Me on the wrong day." Do you want to live with that God? I wouldn't. He won't say that.

So I would hate to misrepresent God by making a devout Sunday-keeper or a devout Friday-keeper feel uncomfortable. Unless it would be the discomfiture that might come if I suggested something that you might find significant, and you might think, "Say, maybe they've got something there, and I ought to look into it a little more." That's not a bad thing. You wouldn't object to that.'

Number One: Love is never rude anyway (as we were reading); and Love is never arrogant; and Love never insists on having its own way. And if we come across like that, then we don't love. And we're the ones who will be outside, and you inside. So we have to watch for that. Do you want to say more about that experience you had? That's a very nice correction to give us.

Comment: It's just the type of impression that I got from being the only non-Adventist in the class. And having the teacher come to me and explain, "You're not Adventist, are you? I'm sorry, I forgot to clue you in on what we were doing."

Maxwell: I see. Well, then you're telling us, we should do that better. Some of the best students we have in this institution are not Seventh-day Adventists. We have a great many of them, some of the most agreeable students in our religion classes. They really are. In fact, the people that I understand they have the least trouble with in chapel attendance, willingness to come to religion class, are our non-Adventist students; because they know it's a religious school, and they have freely chosen to come.

Where some have grown up in the system all the way say, "Oh no, not another religion class." You know. That happens very frequently. So our non-Adventist students are some of the nicest people we have in school. Very much so. And they run off with a lot of A's in religion class. Even two Zoroastrians I had once, who never did agree. But they would give the Christian view from class, and then they'd give the Zoroastrian view. They did a beautiful job of both. And they never did agree. I gave them both A's. They did a beautiful job.

Venden: I appreciate your sensitivity in helping us. And also in your sensitivity to recognize that sometimes just because you're in a situation socially, culturally, a person can end up feeling strange and different; which maybe isn't tied to religion as such, although it's easy to attach it to that, I'm sure. Thank you very much.

Maxwell: You know, the president of the Senior Class not too many years ago was a Nazarene. Isn't that right?

Venden: We had him preach; he preached in church; it was great. All right, we're past our time. Victor, I kind of promised you with a nod, so let's end with Vic's question here.

Comment: Dr. Maxwell, by answering to this question you will be answering to a few hundreds of people that committed us to ask this question. In Europe — and we talked about the Sabbath; we talked about it a lot. In Europe there are some rumors that God's Covenant was discovered. What can I tell them? Is it true? They asked me to ask you personally?

Maxwell: God's covenant was discovered!

Venden: The ark, you mean the ark?

Maxwell: The ark of the covenant! Oh, well, there was a paper in San Diego that announced it. There have been announcements like this every few years. They keep finding the boat, you know. [Comment: Yeah, what [do you think of it?]] But now on the ark of the covenant.

Maxwell: Oh, most of us are extremely skeptical. When it first was announced around they had found the ark, and they named the place, and they had photographers there, and they broke through and took pictures; but they have not developed the pictures yet; they're going to wait. You know, the pictures never do turn up.

And then the word was, that since it was in a certain place, they were going to ask the Rothschild family to send representatives to attend to the opening, and so forth. But then as I read the article in the San Diego paper, it said the one who made this discovery also knew exactly when Christ was going to come, and a whole lot of other things. And I wrote the whole thing off as hocus pocus, myself. Now, it's been awhile since this was first announced, and nothing has been forthcoming.

No, you don't know whether there's anything, do you?

Venden: I was talking with Larry Garrity, one of our leading class archeologists. . .

Maxwell: Oh, now there's an archeologist--a first-class archeologist. Yeah.

Venden: . . . and he expressed the same great reserve over the authenticity of this report.

Maxwell: Yeah, very much so.

Comment: They will be very disappointed.

Maxwell: Yes, although why do we want to find it? What would we do with it?

Comment: [something about the "fourth commandment"?]

Maxwell: Then we'd have a relic. You know. It could match the Shroud of Turin, we'd have the ark. You know. I don't think we could handle it. And the boat: I don't think we can handle it. The thing is, do we need the boat or the box to believe that God can be trusted? I don't think we need it.

Comment: Some people.

Maxwell: Some people? Well, people who are that dependent upon that sort of thing truly are just beginning, and I guess there are some beginners; and it might serve to attract attention. But that's no real basis for confidence. Besides, look at all the years it would take to investigate the box to see if it's genuine. How long has it taken with the Shroud? And with the Boat? I don't think we have time for that sort of thing. I think it would be a sad commentary, if finding them would just give our church an enormous shot in the arm: At last we have a reason for trusting God. That would be very, very sad.

Venden: Graham, you can't help but think of all the miracles that Jesus performed. And then He ended up when He was hanging on the cross, and them saying, "Now, if You'll do something, we'll really believe in You." But it really wasn't adequate. It didn't convince them at all. Well, we've got to close. Would you have prayer with us?

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven,

We thank Thee for the freedom we enjoy to speak together; and we're not all Seventh-day Adventists here. But we love Thee and trust Thee and are willing to listen. We would like to understand Thy ways more clearly. We would like to shed more of the influence of the adversary who has sought to misrepresent Thee to us. And surely he would work most on people who want to worship and want to know. Those who care not, why would he bother them? And so we acknowledge the whole Biblical history of his efforts to deceive and confuse.

Forgive us most of all, if we have misrepresented Thee to each other, to our community, to our children. We thank Thee we still have time, we still have life, we still have the evidence, we still have Thy protect[ion. . . end of tape, side 2]

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, Questions #12

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

Venden: That's such a beautiful statement that you read at the end, and it touches so deeply that it seems to me to come back to the topic or the title for your presentation this evening, in the very title itself you have acknowledged that there are many who have seen God's law as a threat to our freedom.

Maxwell: Oh, yes.

Venden: And many sincere individuals, Christians who have felt that somehow God's law was something from which they wanted to be free. For example, I've heard this text mentioned so often: Romans 10:4 "Christ is the end of the law." Now, doesn't that mean we have freedom from the law? Wouldn't that be the answer to the problem of the law being a hindrance to our freedom. "Christ is the end of the law."

Maxwell: Don't have to love and behave anymore. We can be disorderly and live in chaos.

Venden: Well, now what does that text mean?

Maxwell: Yes, that's the thing. The text needs to be analyzed, first for the words and then for the context. First of all, the word "end." Now what we're really meaning is the purpose of the law, but I doubt that's the meaning in the context. I think it means termination, all right. Law does not have an article in front of it, meaning any particular law. And knowing whether the article is there or not is not totally convincing.

Venden: * accomplish.

Maxwell: You've got to read the whole setting. In the setting, Paul all the way through the book of Romans is contrasting the obedience that springs from love and trust and the obedience that springs from law. And the obedience that springs from law is often the obedience that comes from fear, and that even turns us into rebels as we obey. So he comes to 10:4, it's interesting - doesn't that mean the end of something in * ? Ten-four. "Christ is the Ten-four." "Christ is the termination of law as a way of being saved." That's the meaning.

Venden: All right.

Maxwell: It's the end of legalism, is what that means. Phillip's has a marvelous rendering of that. "Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness by works of law, that everyone who has faith in God may be saved." That's beautifully done.

Venden: But along * with that text of Romans 10:4, I think of the one in Romans 6 which I could hear someone asking. It says, "We are not under the law, but under grace." Now isn't that another statement of real freedom to not be under the law but under grace?

Maxwell: And again, what's the meaning of being under the law? And we often explain that as

meaning we're not under the condemnation of the law. I think, again, it's this contrast with Paul, that in our relationship with God, we're not under law, we're under grace. We do not deal with a legalistic god. We deal with a God who is graciousness personified. And he says, "If you'd realize you are dealing with a gracious God, then that helps to get rid of sin. Because when you're dealing God in a legalistic manner, it even provokes the sin. And you remember in Romans 7, Paul describes this. He says, "There was a day when I looked at the law and it provoked me to sin. Especially Number Ten irritated me, until I realized God's gracious purpose in giving it to us." "Now," he says, "I delight in the law." So one really cannot understand law until one understands God's gracious purpose, which means one has to know what He's like. And that's his message. We do not deal with a God of legalism, but a God of graciousness. It makes all the difference in the world. That makes sin even more serious.

Venden: And then what you're saying is that in that setting, the law has a proper face.

Maxwell: Very much so.

Venden: * Son of God's emergency.

Maxwell: Then why has He chosen emergency measures? Yes.

Venden: You've spoken about various of the Ten Commandments, but as I think about the Seventh-day Sabbath and remember Paul's statement in Romans 14:5 that the Sabbath, speaking in this context of the Sabbath, he says, "Let everyone be persuaded in his own mind." Isn't that just leaving it up for personal choice? What issue should we really make of this? Isn't it just a matter of how you feel about it or your personal feeling? As far as at least the Sabbath is concerned, the fourth Commandment is concerned?

Maxwell: If we take it that way, that would suggest that when it comes to deciding which God you are going follow, you're not free to make up your own mind or any of the others; it's only with respect to the Sabbath. It seems to me that if we had not made up our own minds freely about God, then our worship is worthless. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," is the way God approaches us on everything He asks us to do. It isn't just with respect to the Sabbath. So that doesn't suggest the Sabbath is less important because we're free to make up our own minds. It just says that with respect to love, trust, obedience, you name it, we are free to make up our own minds.

Venden: He doesn't say it doesn't matter what you think.

Maxwell: No.

Venden: He's not saying you don't have freedom that's incomplete.

Maxwell: That's right. And that's why He says, "And therefore, don't go around condemning other people." God does not condemn them. Everyone is free to make up his own mind.

Venden: But He isn't saying all roads lead to the same place.

Maxwell: No, not at all.

Venden: That it doesn't matter what choice you make.

Maxwell: The choice is very important, but it still must be yours.

Venden: It's not forced upon.

Maxwell: Now, before that, he wouldn't say, "One man esteems one day above another; another man esteems all days alike. Let everyone be persuaded in his own mind." Before he knew God as gracious on the Damascus road, he would say, "I know some of you are wrong on this, and I'm on my way to put you into prison, and I'll have you stoned for doing it." Not any more. Now he'd learned that we are not under the law but under grace.

Venden: From your presentation this evening it seems clear that you are convinced that we need to be attentive to all Ten of the Commandments. But isn't a person, you've mentioned the word "legalist" here; isn't a person who is concerned about the law, who is even thinking about the Ten Commandments, isn't such a person a legalist? Isn't that the meaning of legalism? A person who thinks about the law? Shouldn't we be thinking about Jesus rather than about the law?

Maxwell: It's interesting when you think of the fact that to obey the law is to love. This suggests that the loving person is the legalist. And that doesn't seem to make sense. But I think on a broader basis one needs to consider the real meaning of legalism. Currently, my best understanding of the meaning of legalism is this: I believe that with the essence of legalism is preoccupation with our legal standing with a legal, legalistic God. And so many Christians are preoccupied with their legal standing, because they don't really know God. They don't realize that He is a gracious God who is not preoccupied with our legal standing, but like the father of the prodigal son, He is very preoccupied with our welfare and whether or not we will come home. That's what God is preoccupied with. So unfortunately, the word "legalism" is often misused, so I will repeat it. The essence of legalism is preoccupation with one's legal standing with God.

Venden: Well now, Graham, if then you are saying that a person might not be just concerned about the Ten Commandments, let me ask you this: Could a person believe and accept person * as Christ's sacrifice in his or her place in such a way, could he or she think of that in such a way that they would * illustrate/ill effect the illegalist?

Maxwell: Yes, this one * so very carefully. But I really believe that's true. If you believe Jesus died primarily to adjust our legal standing with a god who is preoccupied with our legal standing, you are a legalist. And this means that you no longer take to God the blood of bulls and goats to adjust your legal standing. And I'd want to say this very reverently, you now take him the blood of his son and say, "Will this adjust my legal standing?" He'd say, "That's good; now, you've brought me the right blood." This is legalism.

Venden: So you're saying that the purpose of our idea of salvation, or our experience of salvation on some kind of meeting a legal requirement that satisfies a legal requirement

becomes a matter of legalism.

Maxwell: That's the devil's sad perversion. He has actually taken the death of Christ, which is a monument to freedom, and suggest* that God is not preoccupied with our legal standing, he's turned that into just another ceremony to adjust legal standing. In other words, those who misunderstood the ceremonies in Old Testament times but then became Christians, applied the same misunderstanding to the cross and to the blood of Christ. It's just that now they have better blood and more persuasiveness with the Father to adjust their legal standing. It sounds terrible to say that.

Venden: With that it seems to me that you have broken the idea of the meaning and the problem of legalism to a much broader perspective, a very important perspective. You give us something to think about.

Maxwell: It supports the devil's charges. Either God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe *(or?). See, all legalism is based on the conception that God has to execute those who disobey Him. Therefore, forgiveness will take care of it. That's what produces legalism.

Venden: Well, now, I want to come back to a basic question that I've heard again and again, and I'm sure it will be in the minds of many of our hearers. How do you answer the question, then, "Must one obey God's law to be safe?" You said is not a threat to our freedom, but on the other hand, don't I have to obey it?

Maxwell: Maybe the safest way to approach that in a brief time is to consider the word "obedience." The biblical word means "to hearken, to listen." The Greek word is "to listen humbly." As Micah said, "All God asks of us is that we walk humbly before our God." The thief on the cross didn't have much time to live up to all the precepts of the many, many laws that had been used as God's emergency measures, but he certainly was humbly and gratefully and reverently willing to listen to the One in the middle. And he died willing to listen, sincerely, honestly willing to listen. He will arise in the same frame of mind. And he has much to learn, but he will be a good pupil, a good disciple. Like last week in church. He'll be a good disciple. That means he's willing to listen, to accept instruction, to accept correction.

Venden: Would you feel better then, Graham, if I didn't say you have to obey God's law to be saved. You have to listen to be saved.

Maxwell: Well, to go beyond that even, to obey God's law is to be loving.

Venden: So you have to be loving.

Maxwell: Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless you be born of the Spirit, you will not be saved." And the man who is born of the Spirit, whose fruit is love and truth, will now have truth in the inner man. He will have a new heart and a right spirit. Yes. I would say unless one has the essence of the beginning of this experience of love and trustworthiness, he will not be saved. And that's I John. "Hereby we know if we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I mean, unless we see at the beginning a new regard for each other, we do not have the first symptom of salvation.

Venden: Are you saying that effectively * something wrong with the way I try to press this question on you? Do I have to do this? I'm trying to find out. Is there something I have to do to be saved? Is that the way I am saved? Am I saved because I do such and so?

Maxwell: I'd like to jump to that to one of our latest meetings, and it's on the matter of perfection. Do I have to be perfect? I would say on all these things, these are not things God demands of us; He offers to us. He says, "I offer you a new heart. I offer you right spirit. I offer you healing. Do you want it?" If I don't want it, I'm not savable. In fact the word save means to heal. If I say I don't want to be healed. But to be healed is to have a loving heart and truth in the inner man. Yes.

Venden: Let me try it another way, now.

Maxwell: But to put the Ten Commandments on the wall the way a one might do in a mechanical sort of a way, is to miss the whole point anyway.

Venden: But our subject tonight has to do with a threat to our freedom.

Maxwell: That's right.

Venden: Now, out of what you've said, let me ask this. I trust respectfully. Am I really free if I have to love and obey? Do I need to listen, and how can I think I am really free? *

Maxwell: Well, let's put it this way. If we live in a society where we don't love each other and we can't be trusted, there would be no freedom. There can't be freedom without it. There can't be freedom in a disorderly, chaotic society. In a lawless place, it can't be. So it's an interesting question. You see, isn't it interesting how you can phrase it in just such a way that it sounds like a verb and sounds like a restriction on a freedom, and then you stop to think, what's He asking us to do anyway? Just to love each other, to be trustworthy, to be safe, to be free. Who would want to turn that down? You say, "Do I have to be free? Do I have to be safe? Do I have to be healthy? Do I have to be well?" He says, "No. And I can't command it, but I offer it to you." And some of us say, "I like that very much."

Venden: When Jesus said, and we have this text in our Bible reference sheet in Matthew 11, "Come to Me all you who labor and I will give you rest." But then He talks about listening and obedience. He says, "My yoke is easy." Is this really easy? Is it light?

Maxwell: And light. When in comparison with the many, many rules and regulations they had which made no sense, it was very light. And yet Jesus says, "You have omitted the weightier matters in the law." So in a sense, it's heavy. Heavy is love; is weighty and heavy. You understand its importance. It's very important. I think what makes God's Commandments light is that they make such good sense. They call for intelligent obedience. And when I obey something intelligently, I want to do it. It makes sense. It's dumb not to. Then the burden is God. I think it's in that sense that it actually calls for complete commitment *

Venden: And if we end up describing or trying to describe the kind of world we would like to live

in where things would be wonderful and different from the kind of trauma we find in this world, we end up describing the world God has invented us for.

Maxwell: Exactly.

Venden: What is the truth? You've concluded that talking about the truth, the truth that sets us free, let's remind us again, what is the truth?

Maxwell: Yes, affectionately in the legal model, the truth is we've been forgiven and won't have to go to Hell. I think the truth that sets us free is the truth about God. The kind of Person that He is.

Venden: Does forgiving a person set that person free, just forgiving him?

Maxwell: Forgiveness doesn't change the heart necessarily. Remember last night, when I mentioned heaven will not be peopled with forgiven crooks.

Venden: We're still crooks.

Maxwell: We're still crooks. Unless the heart is changed, there will be no real freedom. This brings up again the difference between the legal model and the healing, health, trust model. And last time in the after service I used a brief illustration of *

Venden: Yes.

Maxwell: I mean, supposing you had to keep rat poison. We're having a lot of trouble with rats now, and I got some. So you had to keep rat poison in your house, and you have a young son. And if he touches it and then eats it, he could be very sick, even die. So you say, "Son, don't touch that rat poison." I'm going to put it on the highest shelf, the * cupboard. A little later you hear a crash in the garage, and you run out, and there's your son lying on the floor. He taken the rat poison and he's dying. Would it do any good to say, "Son, I forgive you, I forgive you?" He'd just die forgiven, that's all. It wouldn't keep him from dying. Nor would it do any good to say, "Son, I don't want you to die, so let me drink the rat poison." And you both die. The boy doesn't need forgiveness. He needs an antidote. He needs healing. But God didn't wait for that. God has said, "You really don't take Me seriously, do you? That sin is like a poison and will lead to your death. Let Me take the poison." And Jesus dies. And we, like the son, say, "Dad, it's real, isn't it." And nobody's killing you. Sin is really a poison, and you are dying. I will take you seriously from here on. The beauty is that God then was able to take His life back and come out living. I've made my point. There's still no legal requirement in that. There's an awesome truth to be revealed. There's nothing arbitrary in this thing. God does not want us to poison ourselves. We need healing. Better heed the warning. The results of sin is death, and don't do this thing. That's the other model. That's the healing model, not the legalistic model.

Venden: Now, we've tried to deal with some of these questions that have come up in a general way. I'd like to move to several specific questions that have come up from our congregation. Here's one: "I've grown up as an Adventist. I always thought the Sabbath would be one of the big issues at the end of time. Is the Sabbath something we should hold onto as a belief?"

Strong enough to die for, if it is a temporary emergency measure just for the present?" That's a very good question.

Maxwell: That's a very good question. Certainly the great controversy is not over a day. It's over a commitment, it's over a great truth, and it's the meaning of the Sabbath that speaks of that truth that makes it an important issue. That those who meaningfully observe the Sabbath in the last days will be publicly declaring that they worship Christ as their God, that the Father is just as gracious as the Son and all the other things we talked about two times ago. Apart from the meaning of the Sabbath, there's not a very good answer to that question. But in the light of its mean, yes indeed, the Sabbath could be a central issue of enormous consequence, and because of its meaning, it could be continued through eternity. Because think of all there would be to remember in the hereafter. A monument to freedom.

Venden: We've had this type of question come in many times, and I'd like to take this specific one as a sample of many who have asked this kind of question: "If God's purpose is to restore to a love relationship with His children, how could asking them to kill an animal," - This has to do with the emergency measures which you spoke about in the Old Testament times - "how could God asking them to kill an animal do this. In my opinion, this would only tend to make people cruel and harden their hearts, rather than create a loving, sympathetic spirit. It would seem to me, it would reflect the cruel spirit of Satan rather than a loving, gracious God." What about that?

Maxwell: Unfortunately, it has had that effect. Because many people offered the sacrifice in hopes that God would love the smell and forgive them and bless them. And it became a rather Satanic thing. And God must have hated this emergency measure and that it had to be that dramatic. It was for Adam, for example, when he killed the first lamb, to be convinced that sin is serious, it does lead to death. I wonder how hard he hit that lamb, and what did he hit it with. Not hard enough to kill it, just hurt it. And he hit it harder. Then blood appeared. He'd never seen that before. And Adam turns to God and says, "God, I'm not sure I can go on with this. It's making me sick." And God says, "May it always make you sick, every time." But they became so accustomed to do it, they could do it almost as a circus, Josephus says, cutting the animals up and brandishing them as they placed them on the altar to be burned. They had forgotten the meaning. That's the thing. But God chose something, like many of His emergency measures, rather awesome, and sometimes rather horrible, in order to sufficiently impress His people.

Venden: I can hear our questioner saying, Well, but with all these risks, why would God go ahead, recognizing that this could happen? Wasn't there a better way?

Maxwell: Sometimes we wish the whole Bible could have been written differently and a littler clearer. I would say the all-wise One used the very best way He knew how, and some have not misunderstood. Some have said, "If you're the One who sees the little sparrow fall, and you asked us to kill these animals, it must have in Your wisdom necessary to impress us sufficiently. And to have, of course, the particular meaning of the Innocent One who was going to come and die this death later on.

Venden: Related to last week and the emergency measures, a questioner writes, "I was disappointed that you used Galatians 3:19,24,25 as referring to the Ten Commandments, where

I was promised *concerned about the doctrine of circumcision, and the entire book was to endeavor to change their view of the ceremonial law. See Acts 15 and so on. Isn't it true that the sacrificial system is the added law?" Doesn't Colossians 2:14-16 talk about a law that was to be blotted out.

Maxwell: One could come to a conclusion, but I think one would pay a price in taking that view and not including all law. What has happened is, we think of a legalist as a person who still follows the ceremonial law, and we say, "There's no way you could be legalistic about the Ten Commandments." And yet the most damaging legalism is with respect to the Ten. I know that the most damaging has been with respect to the Fourth of the Ten Commandments. So I believe Paul's point about all law. All law was an emergency measure to bring us back to faith and a right relationship. That's the point. So if you leave out the Ten, you are suggesting that no way can you be legalistic about the Ten.

Venden: Let's see if we can cover these two in these last two minutes here. If the universe was satisfied when Christ died, then why are we still here?

Maxwell: Ah, that's a great question. * What is God waiting for, is something I think we ought to carry in mind right through our remaining conversations.

Venden: What is He waiting for?

Maxwell: Why did He wait so long to send His Son? Why is He waiting so long to send Him back the second time?

Venden: * would we lose our freedom if God always remembered the righteous? If righteousness always pays off, why. . .

Maxwell: Ah, that might explain why He does it sometimes, as with Job in Scripture. It's true, if every time I did what was right, God would reward me, see what that would do in the way of motivation? Then I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy. I think that would produce obedience number one. And so even like Job, we're not rewarded right away and we love God anyway. "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him," that friend of God was able to say.

Venden: You made some mention here, oh and then number three about why we obey. He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding, my trust is such and that may be true even when it appears that righteousness is not rewarded. What is the difference between killing and murdering? Is it because it damages yourself by just hating your brother? And another person says, "I am confused. `Thou shalt not kill' is a commandment and yet God told His people to kill." Can you touch on that very quickly.

Maxwell: The Hebrew and Greek words both mean murder. "Thou shalt not murder." Many modern versions are so translated, and what's so bad about murdering is, as was mentioned there, what happens inside. And Jesus said, "He who hates his brother has done the damage. He is a murderer." God has never said, "Go and murder people." Now He did instruct them to go and kill in battle, but He didn't want them to. It's very clear. He said, "Let My angel do it. Let

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Me put My children to sleep." He never wanted them to kill at all. That too was an emergency measure. But at the end of the millennium God doesn't violate that law. Do you think He hates His children as they die? He doesn't even kill them. He watches them die and He cries. God has never violated His Ten Commandments. Never.

Venden: Let's take just a moment here to talk about next Friday evening's. Number thirteen in our series, "How God Treats His Erring Children."

Maxwell: Yes. That's the most convincing evidence that God is not arbitrary, exacting, vengeful and severe. In demonstration, not in words.

Venden: Is this what happens when we sin and how that. . .

Maxwell: How He treats us. Not that His kindness would make us careless about sinning. It makes you feel a much worse crook and much less grateful when you do sin.

Venden: Next Friday night.

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