

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER THIRTEEN - 2  
**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER THIRTEEN**  
***HOW GOD TREATS HIS ERRING CHILDREN***

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Number Thirteen: "**How God Treats His Erring Children**"--another look at some of the most convincing evidence that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be.

What will it be like some day to stand in the presence of the Infinite One and realize that He knows everything about us? Even if we are among the saved, will it be comfortable to spend eternity with Someone who knows us so well? Will God haunt us with the memory of our sinful past?

Our answer to this question depends upon the kind of Person we believe our God to be. All Scripture speaks to the question, not merely in promises and claims but in evidence and demonstration. Never was the truth about this matter more clearly revealed than in the way Jesus treated even the worst of sinners--the woman who "lived an immoral life in the town," self-righteous Simon, the paralytic at the pool, the quarreling disciples, the traitor Judas, the cowardly and impulsive Peter, even His pretentiously pious accusers and the men who nailed Him to the cross. Clearly, we have no need to fear God's infinite memory. God is forgiveness personified. Our Heavenly Father finds no pleasure in the embarrassment of His children. Sinners though we all have been, we shall be comfortable in His presence for eternity.

Or would we only be comfortable and safe if God should blot out all memory--including His own--of everything that has happened in the great controversy?

Welcome to the thirteenth of our conversations about God--another look at our Heavenly Father in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government. The subject for our thirteenth conversation is "**How God Treats His Erring Children.**" This provides us an opportunity to consider again what I believe is the most convincing evidence that God is *not* the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be. From this evidence He is clearly just the opposite. He is *not* arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe.

What do you think it will be like some day to stand in the presence of the Infinite One and realize that He knows everything about us, and that is, everything? We all will stand there, whether we are saved or lost. Forbid the thought, but if anyone of us here should die on the way home from this meeting tonight (I hope we all will be back for church in the morning), the next moment of consciousness, that person would be face to face with God. Hopefully that will be at the second coming and not at the third.

The Bible makes this dramatically clear in so many places. One of the most vivid passages is in Revelation 20:11,12 (RSV). "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it...And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened...And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done." Even if we are among the saved, will it be comfortable to spend eternity with Someone who knows us so well? Even though we have been forgiven, we all have been sinners. Look at the verse selected from the long passage in Romans 3:10,23 (Twentieth Century New Testament), "There is not even one who is righteous....For all have sinned, and all fall short of God's glorious

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ideal."

Even though we are saved, even though we have been forgiven, will God haunt us with a memory of our sinful past, in which we all share? The answer, of course, depends, as does everything else during this conversation series, upon the kind of person we believe our God to be. All through Scripture, God has spoken to this question, not in claims or even in promises alone, but with evidence and with demonstration. Surely the most convincing demonstration was provided by the way Jesus treated even the worst of sinners. Here was God in human form face to face with sinners and look at how He treated them. Which one should we choose?

One of the best known of all the sinners was the poor woman taken in adultery, not to mention the very pious, but very heartless accusers who brought her to Christ. You remember the whole story described in the gospel of John (see Jn. 8:1-11). Those very religious men brought this poor woman to Christ in an attempt to entrap Him once again, they thought, in contradicting the Old Testament. This was not the first time they had sought to entrap Him like this. But each time they had tried it before, He had met them with His customary skill and grace and the whole occasion had turned against them. This time, to make certain they could convince the crowds, they came with "unquestionable evidence". They arrived with the woman and said, "We caught her in the very act."

Now, it is immediately apparent from the story what kind of people these were. According to the Old Testament rules, they should have brought the man. There is no way they could claim they didn't observe the man, because they said they had caught her in the very act. This would be difficult to do without observing the partner. Their dishonesty was immediately apparent.

They said to Jesus after they put this poor woman in front of the large crowd, "You know the texts in the Old Testament. You know what the Bible says should be done to this woman. Do you agree? Should she be stoned or not?" The whole crowd watched to see what Jesus would say.

He chose to say nothing. Instead He bent over as you know. And He wrote with His finger in the dust on the ground. A few footprints, a few puffs of air, and the record would be gone. It doesn't say in the Bible that He wrote their sins, but judging by their reaction, apparently this is what He wrote upon the ground. As they looked over His shoulder and saw their lives delineated in the dust, they left one by one from the oldest to the youngest. Before they left, Jesus turned to them as He was writing these things down and said, "I suggest that the one of you who brought this woman, the one of you who has never sinned, throw the first stone at her." Then He bent down and went on writing.

When they were all gone, He turned to the woman who was left there and said, "Where are your accusers?" She looked up and said, "I don't know. They are gone." Then those incredible words, spoken to a woman who had committed a crime that we all seem to agree is one really reprehensible act, He said, "I don't condemn you either. Just go home and be a better woman from now on."

Look at how this is recorded in John 8:7, 9-11 (GNB). "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.'...When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. He straightened up and said to her, 'Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?' 'No one sir,' she answered. 'Well, then,' Jesus said, 'I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.'" She could hardly believe the words and became one of His firmest friends.

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How graciously and generously Jesus, the Son of God, sought to recover the woman's dignity and self-respect. We marvel at His treatment of her! But what about His treatment of those pious, heartless accusers? He evidently knew the facts of their lives by what He wrote in the dust. Why didn't He instead gather the crowd a little closer and say, "Let Me tell you something about these pretentiously pious frauds. Do you know what this one has done, and that one?" Didn't they deserve to be exposed? What does it say about God that He didn't expose those self-righteous accusers? Is it that God finds no pleasure in embarrassing His children? Weren't those accusers also members of His family? You remember, in one of our first conversations, we considered the fact that all children, good and bad, are members of God's family. God did not publicly humiliate those men, much as we would agree that they deserved it.

Think of the story of Simon, the leper healed by Jesus (Lk. 7:36-50). He invited Jesus to a dinner at His house. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were also invited. Luke says that Mary was known for living an immoral life in the town (see Lk 7:39). Some understand that this is the same woman taken in adultery. You remember during the feast, this woman anointed Jesus feet with expensive perfume. She tried to keep it private, but forgot that the fragrance would fill the air. It became public. Simon said, within himself, "If Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this is that is touching Him. He would know what kind of sinful life she lives."

Jesus spoke up and said, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

"Speak on," Simon answered.

Jesus told the story of the two debtors. Simon realized that Jesus knew his innermost thoughts. That means that Jesus knew what a sinner he had been. Simon held his breath to see if Jesus would expose him before the crowd. Surely self-righteous Simon deserved to be exposed. Jesus handled it privately. He maintained Simon's dignity and reputation with his associates. He did not expose him and meanwhile He graciously accepted Mary's impulsive act. Think what these stories tell us about our God.

Then you remember the experience with the paralytic at the pool (Jn. 5:1-8). For thirty-eight years he had been trying to get into the water. One Sabbath afternoon he looked up and the kindest face he had ever seen looked back at him and said, "Would you like to be well?" Jesus didn't lecture the man on the youthful self-indulgence that may have caused his illness in the first place. He simply asked if he would like to be well. "If so, get up, put your mat under your arm and go home."

Later, Jesus met him and said, "I suggest you stop sinning, lest something worse befall you" (vs. 14). He always spoke in that order. First, Jesus made people comfortable. He healed them, especially sinners who might be despising themselves. He tried to recover their dignity and self-respect. How can you ask a person to act with dignity when you have deprived him of his self-respect? God always first restores this. Later He said to "stop sinning, lest something worse befall you."

Picture Jesus in the upper room the night before He was crucified. The record said that the twelve disciples were squabbling as to which one of them was the greatest (Lk. 22:14-23). If you look in Luke's account, he has it in this order. Jesus said to the twelve, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover supper with you... But the one who is to betray Me is sitting with Me at the table." They began to argue as to which one of them would do this terrible thing. But they also were arguing as to which one of them should be thought of as the most important. Can you imagine their arguing about such a subject mixed in with which one of them is going to betray Him?

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How did the Son of God treat them? Did He chide them for their childish behavior? Did he scold them for their unwillingness to wash each other's feet? Instead, the whole universe watched as their Creator, the One they worshipped, arose, got a basin and a towel, and the Supreme Creator got down on His knees and washed a dozen pairs of dirty feet (Jn. 13:1-30). He even washed the feet of His betrayer, Judas. Think what it says about God that He would treat them in this way? Jesus could have looked up at them and said, "You don't believe My Father would be willing to do this, do you?"

This is why during communion, I never like to do anything else but to think (and to talk but very little). What moved the disciples was not that they washed each other's feet. What moved them was that God washed their feet! You can imagine their experience as they looked down on His head bent over the basin and felt His strong carpenter hands on their feet. Then to have Him look up and say, "You don't think My Father would do this, do you? But He would. If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. If you are comfortable with Me, you will be just as comfortable with My Father." This is what He was trying to say to them in the upper room.

Think what fools they were to miss the opportunity to wash the feet of the Son of God before He died! What a memory one of the disciples could have had for eternity! Imagine Jesus meeting him a million years into eternity and saying, "John (or Peter or James), I'll never forget how you washed my feet the night before I was crucified." That disciple would never get over it. They missed it because of their misbehavior there in the upper room.

Though Jesus told them one of them would betray Him, did He expose him before the others? No, it says in the Biblical record, when Judas left to do quickly what he had determined to do, they thought Jesus had asked him to go buy provisions for the feast, or perhaps even make an offering to feed the poor. Look at the record in John 13:27-29 (NEB). "Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you have to do.' No one at the table understood what he meant by this. Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor."

Think how Jesus covered for His betrayer. Why didn't Jesus expose him before the others? Of all people, the traitor deserved it? But the traitor was a member of God's family, just a seriously misbehaving one. Again, God has no pleasure in embarrassing His children.

Later Peter, James, and John went with Him out to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus passed through the awesome experience of separation from His Father to answer the question, "Does sin result in death?" If so, is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God? He suffered there alone, apparently abandoned by the Father. Three times He came over to where the disciples were dozing. He wanted their companionship and comfort. In the end, did He scold them for not helping Him? No, He made an excuse for them. He said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. I understand, you three. You were just too tired." (see Matt. 26:36-46)

Again, think what they missed. What if the three of them had gotten up and walked back and knelt around Christ, put their hands on His shoulder, while He went through that experience. What a memory they would have had for the rest of eternity. Imagine Jesus running into those three from time to time throughout eternity, and saying, "Peter, James, and John, I will never forget how you knelt with Me in Gethsemane when I wanted you to so much." But they slept through it all and Jesus didn't scold them.

Just a few hours later, Peter was cursing and swearing to prove that he didn't even know

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this Christ (Matt. 26:69-75). Then the cock crowed just as Jesus had said it would, right after Peter's bold speech in the upper room. He had boasted that though all the others would desert Jesus, he would give his life (Matt. 26:31-35). You remember, after Peter had done this, he wondered if Jesus had noticed. Although Jesus was on trial for His life and had suffered so, He was more concerned about His erring disciple out there in the courtyard than He was about Himself. Luke says that Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. (Lk. 22:61) Imagine yourself standing there.

As Peter knew God up to that time, he might well have expected to see indignation and disapproval in Christ's face. He deserved it. Instead he saw sorrow, to be sure, disappointment and pity. Why, it was the face of the One who had washed his dirty feet the night before. When Peter saw that look on Jesus' face, he ran out of the courtyard and wept bitterly. (vs. 62)

Look at the account as written by three of the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Beginning with Mark 14:27,29,31 (RSV). "Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away...' Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not... if I must die with you, I will not deny you.'" Then Matthew adds, in 26:69,70,72,74 (RSV), "And a maid came up to him, and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you mean... I do not know the man.'... Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know the man.'" Then Luke adds in Luke 22:61,62 (GNB), "The Lord turned around and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered that the Lord had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.' Peter went out and wept bitterly."

Later, Judas came in to the same court and threw the thirty pieces of silver on the ground and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood (Matt. 27:3,4). He, too, looked at Jesus. Do you think he saw a different look on Jesus' face? Was there anger? Was there wrath? Was there rejection? He deserved it. No, Judas was one of Jesus' children and He was about to lose him. Jesus looked at Judas just as He had looked at Peter. There was the same sorrow, the same disappointment, the same pity. Again it was the face of the one who had just the night before knelt down and washed Judas' dirty feet. Overcome with it all, Judas ran out and committed suicide. What a wonderful ending it would have been if Judas had been touched by that look on Jesus face, just as Peter had been, and he had run out of the court and found where Peter was weeping and the two of them together had become new men. What a happy end to the story that would have been! But all heaven watched the other.

Imagine how Peter felt all that Sabbath. During the last twenty-four hours he had made a fool of himself repeatedly--twice with his impetuous statements in the upper room and twice disgracing himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then the cowardly behavior in the courtyard, denying that he had even known Christ! Now Christ was dead and there was no way he could make it up to Him, and no way he could make it right. No wonder when he heard that the tomb was empty, he was the first one down there on Sunday morning. (Jn. 20:3-6)

But it wasn't Peter, it was Mary, who had the privilege of seeing Jesus first and taking the good news to the disciples. Why do you suppose it would be Mary, of all people? Mary who was known for living an immoral life in the town. Mary, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils. Would we have elected her for that high honor? God chose her for it. I have enjoyed my wife's comment, that if Mary hadn't cared enough to be there, God could not have so honored her. That is true also, isn't it?

Then later, when Mary turned and recognized Jesus and fell at His feet to worship Him, Jesus didn't say, "Don't touch Me! Don't touch Me, Mary! If you touch Me, I can't go to heaven."

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What would that say about our God? No, in the language of the day, He said to Mary (look in John 20:17 Noli), "... `Do not detain Me, (literally, do not go on holding Me or clinging to Me.' Greetings took a little time in those days.) `for I have not yet ascended to My Father. But go to My brethren (My brothers) and tell them that I am going up to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.'" (Parentheses supplied)

Listen to Jesus calling the disciples His brothers. These were the men who had let Him down so seriously when He needed them so much. When the angels confirmed Jesus' command to go and tell the disciples, they added something that must have overwhelmed Peter when he heard it. They said, (look at Mark 16:7 GNB) "'Now go and give this message to His disciples, including Peter. "He is going to Galilee ahead of you..."'" How very Godlike of the angels to add, "especially tell Peter". The angels admire and worship God for the incredibly gracious way in which He has handled sinners in His family. How much those angels must have enjoyed adding those words, "And especially tell Peter."

There are many more examples we all could add, but is this not the kind of God with whom we may spend eternity if we trust Him? If we have the privilege of spending eternity with this One of infinite memory, we have no need to be afraid of that memory, for God is forgiveness personified. He has promised not only to forgive us, but to treat us as if we had never sinned.

Think of all the verses that say this. Look at Isaiah 38:17 (RSV). "For Thou has cast all my sins behind Thy back." Another one is Micah 7:19 (GNB). "You will trample our sins underfoot and send them to the bottom of the sea!" Now there is no pretense or forgetfulness in this. God knows what sinners we all have been. The angels have watched our every deed. We know all the things we have done. These things are not forgotten. Yet, we are treated as if we had always been God's loyal children.

This does not mean that God has gone soft on sin. Think what it has cost Him to answer the questions and meet the emergencies that sin has caused in His family. You recall that on some serious occasions, it was necessary for gentle Jesus to call sin by its right name and denounce it in strongest terms. Do you remember when those pretentiously pious Bible teachers, trusted so much by the people, denounced Jesus' picture of His Father as satanic (Jn. 8:44,49)? Think of saying that the Son of God's own description of His own Father was heretical, unbiblical, and diabolical. Think that it was Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, Bible teachers who made that accusation. Because of their great influence on the people, Jesus turned to them and said, "No, it is not I who has the devil. You are of your father, the devil, and you prefer his lies to the truth." Yet, when He said that, you know there were tears in His voice.

Even in the final awesome death of the wicked, God is still respecting the freedom and the individuality of His intelligent creatures. He has made it very plain all through the 66, that He doesn't want to lose any of His children. Look at 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV). "The Lord is...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

It is emphasized all through the Old Testament as well as the new. Look at Ezekiel 33:11 (RSV). "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" Like a physician, God stands ready to heal us, but He cannot force us to be well. If we insist on leaving Him, He will respect our decision and sadly let us go. As we leave Him for the last time to reap the awful consequences, we will hear His sad cry in Hosea (11:8), "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" We discussed that dramatic story when we talked about why Jesus had to die, you remember.

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As God interpreted what Hosea had done, He said that "I have pled so long, so many years, centuries, with My people Israel to please come home. Bring words of repentance with you," God said, "and I will heal you and forgive you." You remember that when the prodigal son did this, Jesus told the story to show how glad God is when anyone does come home. How eager He is to heal. How magnificent is that story told so many times. Just a little of it in Luke 15:20-24 (NEB). Look what this says about the attitude of our Father toward His sinful children. "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Fetch a robe, my best one, (don't you like that!) and put it on him...and let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found'". (parentheses supplied) Jesus added that there is joy before the angels in heaven whenever anybody comes back. Even the angels are pleased when we come home.

But Israel did not come back in the days of Hosea. So those sad words that follow in Hosea 14:1,2,4 (Phillips). "But come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God! Take words of repentance with you as you return to the Lord;...I will heal their unfaithfulness, I will love them with all My heart." But they didn't come. Look at Hosea 11:7,8 (Phillips). "My people are bent on turning away from Me;...How, oh how, can I give you up Ephraim! How, oh how, can I hand you over Israel." But He will sadly hand us over if we insist on turning away.

I understand that God will miss us if we are lost. He will miss us forever if we don't come home. Think of the eternal void that brilliant Lucifer will leave in the infinite memory of God. But for some of us, this magnificent picture of God leads us to repentance and to trust. Remember that well known verse in Romans 2:4 (RSV), "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" When we hear this good news about God, it leads some of us to trust. So in trust and confidence we actually look forward to seeing the Infinite One. Next time when He comes, He will come in unveiled majesty and power. We will not be afraid, sinners though we all have been, we will be comfortable in His presence for eternity.

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***Conversations About God - Tape 13B***

Venden: Regarding the Law in Galatians, Graham--the law that was added--it's talking about circumcision. So in that setting when it talks about the law being added, isn't that, - that it would seem like it's talking about the ceremonial law. And you've made a point that broadened it considerably. And also, some of us are well aware - we have the feeling, at least — there's been a great deal of vigorous discussion in the history of our church on that subject — the place of the Law, the Law in Galatians. I wish you would deal with that, for our questioner's sake, and for all our sake.

Maxwell: That's been a much debated thing ever since Christianity. And one member - Brother Hagan, are you here anywhere? - one member of our group had been sending in such thoughtful material; and so it's valuable material in our history on this verse.

Which law was added because of transgression, to be the pedagogue, the guardian, the protector, the schoolmaster (King James) to bring us to Christ? And we are so concerned often as Adventists to preserve the Decalogue because it houses the Seventh-day Sabbath, that we sometimes, I think, are too quick to say, "Well, it's the ceremonial law; because if you include the Ten Commandments, it seems to suggest that when it has done its work and brought us to Christ, it might not have any further function, you see. We're not His sons.

I think if one reads all of Galatians and Romans, and gets Paul's entire argument, he very clearly says, If you trust God and have a right relationship, you're not going to make light of law. You're not going to make light of any of His laws. You're not going to make light of His whole legal system that He has used. And of course, the most wonderful statement of the principles of God's government, are in the Decalogue, in the Ten. The principles in the Ten are eternal, as far as that's concerned. But God's expression -- you know, eight of them are in the negative, aren't they, even? "Thou shalt not"; "thou shalt not." There are only two that say, "Honor thy father and thy mother," and "Remember the Sabbath Day." The rest are Don't do this; don't do that; I want the murdering to stop, and so on.

This is obviously a tailored expression of these principles, tailored to the needs of the people. I think Paul's whole point in Galatians is not only provoked by the circumcision problem. He's also concerned about eating food offered to idols. You remember? He's also concerned about the fact that some people consider one day above another. Now one group considered all days alike. And they were condemning each other. He's trying to cover all of that. He says, "Let me deal with this whole subject of Law. Yes, God has used Law as an emergency measure because we have needed it. Ideally, God does not govern by expressing His wishes in terms of law - any law whatever. Because you really can't command people to love and to trust. You even can't command people to enjoy the Sabbath. And it says, you know, "If it's a delight to you, then it's serving you well." And you can't command that either. But when people are misbehaving, then you have to have recourse for that.

Well, in our own history, as you know there was the debate over whether it was the Ceremonial Law or the Ten Commandments. And around 1888, two men, Jones and Waggoner - one a physician, one a minister - took the view that the Law that was added to be our schoolmaster was the Decalogue; over against the more prevailing view that the law that was added to be our protector, was the ceremonial law.

And it is on record that Ellen White said that both sides were wrong in this thing. I believe that if you make it either the ceremonial or the moral, it's wrong; because you're missing his point. His point is, law as such, the whole system of law as such, was given by God to bring us to Christ.

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That's still the function of the Law. And since we're still misbehaving, we still need many of it, especially the expressed principles of the Ten Commandments.

Ellen White was asked, "What law was added?" Since I can pick her as the most representative Seventh-day Adventist in this matter: she said, "I am asked which law was added to be the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. I say both the ceremonial and the moral law. But," she said, "if it is one law above another, the Holy Spirit in this passage is speaking especially of the moral law." Dated 1896; now in print in 1 Selected Messages, p. 234.

Brother Hagan very kindly sent me something very valuable, that when the argument was going on with Jones and Waggoner, and the others, and Elder Butler, and Mrs. White were speaking to it, a man by the name of Pierce said, "I think it's an error to say it's either ceremonial or moral." He said, "I think it's the whole law system."

And she said, "That man is right." Now, that's my view. I hadn't read that before. I appreciated it. It's the whole system of law. It's the whole use of law, whatever law, whether ceremonial or moral. God's whole emergency use of law was added to bring us to Christ. Ideally, He does not like to use law.

Now note Ellen White's comment here, that when God first mentioned law up in Heaven where sin began, it came to the angels as something unthought of that there should be any law. You know that statement too. So, if you want to know what Ellen White's view was at the time, this is what she said.

Let me read you that last one. It's really quite impressive. It's in Mount of Blessing, p. 161. You know, many of our friends have the feeling that Ellen White was a bit of a legalist. She was the opposite. She was extraordinary in her understanding, and I love a chance to speak well of what she wrote.

"In Heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Stan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angles almost as an awakening to something unthought of. [Then God had never mentioned it to them.] In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery."

But then God had to begin speaking of law in terms appropriate to angels, then in terms appropriate to men. And as we went from bad to worse, He added and He added and He added.

And she also says that if only we had followed the simple instructions given to Adam and Eve, there would have been no need for circumcision, no need to announce the Ten Commandments on Sinai or write them on the tables of stone. Nor would there have been need for the multiplied rules and regulations that were added afterwards.

Now, I think that's a totally Biblical position. That was her position. That's why I honor her theology as so dependable. I find her in such harmony with Scripture.

So on the light of all of that, even whether she had said it or not, I take the view that it was the system of law that was added, because of transgression, to bring us to Christ. That includes all law. And since the Ten Commandments are most particularly directed toward our needs as transgressors, of all the laws added to bring us to Christ, #1 was the Moral Law. That's not doing away with it. By no means! The principles enunciated there and tailored to our needs as sinners -- I hope He never changes those principles, or love, trust and freedom are gone. I hope He never budes on that. But He'll never need to express them like that.

So it was added only in terms that it was expressed; it was told to us; and it was tailored to us. The principle of love, truth and freedom - that has never varied, never will vary for all eternity.

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What do you think, now? We could revive 1888 and other episodes in our history to discuss this. Yes.

Comment: What was it that Paul says was nailed to the cross, other than Jesus Himself?

Maxwell: OK. He says in that verse, He doesn't say, "A law was nailed to the cross," you see. It says, "The handwriting of ordinances." And sometimes we're rather seduced by the word "handwriting" to note that Moses wrote with his hand those other commandments, you see. Whereas the Ten Commandments were not hand-written; they were finger-written. Sometimes we work very hard to make distinctions, you know.

The word "handwriting" is pronounced "cheirographon." You can see "chir" as in "chiropodist" or "chiropractor"; or even "surgeon" comes from this Greek word "chir" which means hands. A surgeon is a man who practices with his hands. So is a chiropractor. You know, they both have the source, those two words, interestingly. The passage of time does things to words.

Then the second part, cheiro-graphon; "graphon" as in graphite or photography, calligraphy, and so on. Calligraphy is writing. Cheirographon is handwriting. We still don't know what it means. The word does not occur in the Bible anywhere else. But you will find it in the Apocrypha. So if you are a devout Roman Catholic student of the Bible, I shouldn't say it's not in the Bible; it's in your Bible. It's in the book of Tobit. And in the book of Tobit, Tobias takes some money to visit relatives, leaves the money with them. In exchange he is given a cheirographon, a handwriting. Later on, he wants his money. So he goes back and he presents them the cheirographon; he gets his money back. What do you suppose a cheirographon is? It's a bond, and agreement, you see, a receipt.

Now guess what was nailed to the cross? So as you read in most modern versions, it will say, when Jesus died, He nailed the bond, the broken agreement, you know, the sentence is hung over our heads; He nailed that to the cross. Now, having taken care of the sin problem that way on the cross, He says, "Why are you going around still arguing over these other matters, condemning people? I've made it plain, I don't condemn people. I made that clear by the way I died. Why are you condemning people?" He says, "Don't even criticize them with respect to Sabbath-keeping," in the rest of Colossians 2.

And we say, "Oh, now don't include the Seventh-day Sabbath, because you can condemn people if they don't agree with you on the Sabbath." Is that right? Never. No. We can never judge and condemn other people. It doesn't matter whether it's a ceremonial Sabbath or a Seventh-day Sabbath. We don't criticize and condemn.

Now you go back to Romans 14, where Paul says, "One man esteems one day above another. Another man esteems all days alike. And I'm on my way put you in prison and stone you if you take that view; because you should agree with me, in esteeming one day above another." Before the Damascus Road, that's what Paul would have said. Since the Damascus road, Paul says, "Look, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." And we say, "Now, that cannot include the Seventh-day Sabbath; because that suggests you're free to make up your own mind on the Sabbath, and you're not! You have to keep it and you have to enjoy it, or you'll be destroyed."

You can't keep the Sabbath that way. No, the truth about the Sabbath is, if it isn't enjoyed, it's not much of a blessing to us; and you can't command that. So truly you'd better be convinced in your own mind. So Paul says, "You can't judge and condemn anybody else for what he's doing. It's none of your business. However, each one of us must give account of himself to God. And

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everything we do is naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have the account. Of course, God's our Friend. But, you know, if we've gone our own way, what else can He do but let us go? And He will.

Then, see Paul really enlarged his understanding of God; and hence he never criticized anybody else anymore, or judged them, or condemned them. Then you say, "Well, he'd become wishy washy. He had no convictions after the Damascus Road." Paul says, "Let me tell you about my convictions. If even an angel from Heaven should disagree with me, let him be," you know what. Very strong language in the versions. You see, Paul was now convinced absolutely, that you don't condemn other people. That's what was not negotiable anymore. He was convinced about freedom and being gracious to people. He said, "I am immovably convinced that that's the way to behave." Now that's a strong conviction too.

You see, to be nice is thought to be weak by some people. To be meek and gentle, is thought to be weak. With some of us, we are absolutely convinced that's the way to behave. Our strongest conviction is about being gentle, and meek. That doesn't make sense to a lot of people. Strong people aren't meek and gentle. Strong people don't respect other people's freedom.

No, you can be so convinced about freedom, you'd give your life to support freedom as Jesus did. That's the way Paul was from then on. You see how much is involved in this matter of what law was added, and what was nailed to the cross. I would say the whole sin problem was nailed to the cross in God's way. And since we understand that and what it says about God, how can we go around condemning and criticizing other people anymore? He didn't. He said, "I haven't come to condemn."

Venden: There's one other question that ties in there; although you've really answered it, I believe. But let me just go back to it.

If you say that the Ten Commandments are among the laws, the principle of law, the law system that's added; what does that do to the idea that many of us have held and were brought up with, that the Ten Commandments have always existed? Now, you talked about principles. My guess is that you're go down that road, and . . .

Maxwell: Definitely. You would too, I suspect.

Venden: I think so.

Maxwell: Because He ever went to the angels and said, "You shall not commit adultery." They'd say, "Well, what's that?" "Well, you'll find out someday." You know, it wouldn't make a lot of sense, would it? Or, "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother." Or, "I want all the murdering to stop." They weren't murdering anyway.

So the principles are there. And you know, the Bible repeatedly states the distilled essence of the Ten. Moses said, "To love God, and your neighbor as yourself, and not to hate your neighbor in your heart, is to keep the Ten. Then the lawyer asked Jesus, "What does it mean?" He said, "To love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself. Then Paul comes along, and he's asked. He says, "The man who loves his neighbor has fulfilled all law. Wherefore, love is the fulfilling of the Law.

Love is eternal. If God modifies that, the future is not going to be so good to look forward to. We do not wish Him to budge on running His universe this way. Because being a God of Love, Love is never rude, is never arrogant, it's not impatient, it doesn't even insist on having its own way. How about the Infinite One not insisting on having His own way. That's incredible!

So He says, "I will run My universe that way." And we don't want Him to change. Anybody here want Him to change the Decalogue? Our Decalogue is a guarantee of freedom. We don't want

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Him to qualify it, or modify it one tiny bit. But I don't think He'll put it to the wall, on the wall, with those words, "A million years, children; I want all the murdering to stop." It wouldn't make sense, would it?

So I rather expect that on a Sabbath Afternoon, perhaps we can take a stroll through the Heavenly Museum; take a look at those tables, and say, "Thank You, God, for doing that when we needed it so badly. And all the ceremonial laws too; thank You for those as well; we needed them. And Thank You for all those ideas about a mediator and an intercessor; because when we were so scared, that brought us great hope. Now we realize You love us just as much as the Son, and we don't need anybody in between. Now we've become friends."

That's why faith establishes all the things that God has done, by putting them in proper perspective. That way you don't say, "Throw out that terrible ceremonial law; it was against us." God gave it to us because we needed it to help us. And look what it taught; salvation by faith in the One to come. How could you say that's against us? What was against us, was that cheirographon.

If you want to be technical, by the way, it says that what He nailed to the cross was against us. He took it out of the way and nailed it to the cross. Now, the Greek says, "The handwriting with the legal requirements." Now, the legal requirements weren't nailed to the cross. That's the ceremonial system. What happened was, the sentence of death was nailed to the cross; and until the cross came, we had the whole ceremonial system sort of hanging from it, you know, like all the small print below, pointing towards the day when Jesus would nail this thing to the cross. But the ceremonies weren't against us. What was against us was it, singular, even neuter gender. It's not the Laws. It's not the ceremonies. It's not the rituals. None of those things were against us. But that broken agreement stood against us. "All that the Lord has said, we will do," and forty days later dancing drunk around the golden calf. They kept doing that. He said, "That stands against you. But I'll take care of it. Meanwhile, here's all this system to point forward to the solution; it's for you."

I think the ceremonial law still has a great message to us: What kind of a God would stoop to give us that whole system to teach us what we needed to know under those certain circumstances? I think the ceremonial law speaks very well of God. And we don't want to throw that out. Jesus said, "Not one jot nor one tittle shall pass from (the Ten Commandments? No, He didn't say that; He said, "the Law and the Prophets, till all be fulfilled." He meant the whole Bible. We don't throw out any part of it. Nothing in the Bible has become irrelevant. And we need to read it all. That's why I'm so sold on the Sixty-six books approach; because everything He gave in there speaks eloquently of God as He has met us in our emergencies with such skillful emergency measures.

The "it" that was against us, is what was nailed; and it wasn't the ceremonial law. I'll have to be careful. Ellen White said it wasn't the moral law that was nailed; it was the ceremonial law. And you read it in the whole setting. What she's saying is, "The nail went through the sentence, and appended to it and flapping in the breeze, was all the rules and regulations which came to their logical meaningful end when He met the types on the cross. But the nail didn't go through the ceremonial system. It was for us, to teach righteousness by faith.

So, it looks better in the Greek, even, than in English.

Comment: Dr. Maxwell, you mentioned the fact of going to Heaven and feeling comfortable in the presence of a God who knows everything about it. But for us who have grown up as Seventh-day Adventists, we've been told that there's going to be an Investigative Judgment, and not only is God going to know it, but every intelligent being that has ever lived, is going to know

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every secret thing, every thought, everything he's done - ever! So, it's more than a question, Are we comfortable with God; but everybody we meet. . .

Maxwell: That's right.

Comment: . . . throughout eternity, is going to know everything we did. And still we're going to get along.

Maxwell: Yes. Very much so! That's why I say that some of us who love to pass a bit of juicy gossip along, are advertising our unsuitability for admission to that place where there'll be so much knowledge shared. God will not allow any of us in there who would make life miserable for Rahab - or Samson! You take those characters in Hebrews 11. It simply stunning that they're on that list. You know, it starts out with great saints; you know, like Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses, and so on. But then it comes down to some others. There's Samson, and Rahab, and let me see, who are some of the others in there? Jephthah, even. The one who said, "I'll sacrifice the first thing when I come home."

Well, that's a notorious list! And wouldn't we like to know more? Or would we? What I like, is the thought that in the Hereafter, people like David and Uriah will be able to meet and not come to blows. When you think how David stole his best friend's wife - a man who had risked his life to put him on the throne — and then arranged for the murder of his best friend. And the murder was made possible because he counted on the loyalty of Uriah to accept his request: "Will you please go defend me over here?"

And Uriah said, "I've always defended you, my lord. I will go and do it." And then he said to the General, you know, "Separate yourselves from him and let him die." Now, Uriah apparently was a good man; gave his wife in service to his king. And David repented thoroughly. Look at the 51st Psalm.

And then let us assume Solomon, and Bathsheba, all make it to the Kingdom. The day is coming inevitably when - and I'd love to be behind a camellia bush to see this occur - that David and Uriah will meet. Two strong military men. Now, will they throw their arms around each other and say, "Oh, what a wonderful recollection we have of our friendship in the past!"

Of course, if Bathsheba's standing there, and Solomon, Uriah is throwing his arms around Bathsheba, too. And then saying, "And who's this splendid young man standing here?"

"That's my son, Solomon."

"Well, Bathsheba, I didn't know I left you pregnant when I went to war."

"Well, Uriah, you didn't."

"Well, who's this young man's father?"

"Over here - David."

Now, will they come to blows? You see. Now, if they can't remember, a very wonderful thing will not be able to happen. I believe those two very strong men will be able to meet, and look into each other's eyes, and remember, and once more become friends. Now, that would be a much greater miracle, it seems to me.

If we're only going to be safe and comfortable because we can't remember, then after all, God has had to manipulate things in order to accomplish peace and unity. He's never going to do it. We're going to have peace in spite of it all be well known.

You know, we have to meet our guardian angels. Have you ever thought your guardian angel may have asked for transfer to a more promising case many times? Because who wants to be

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the guardian angel of a loser in the hereafter? You know. Wouldn't you want to hear your candidate had made it? We have to meet them.

Will your guardian angel say, "By the way, I've been looking forward to this. Do you remember Friday night, right after Conversations About God #13, you went to town and did this. . . I couldn't believe it! Right after that meeting, you know! How could you do it? And when we get through with that, I've got about a thousand more." You'd be avoiding your guardian angel, and you'd be avoiding God and everybody else, and everybody you ever hurt. We'll all be avoiding each other for eternity?

No, I love the thought that Manasseh can meet Isaiah. You remember the gospel prophet was put in a hollow log and sawn in half by evil king Manasseh. But after being the wickedest king who ever lived for fifty years, Manasseh was converted. Spent five years trying to repair the damage done. Couldn't. Couldn't win his son. And he died a candidate for the Kingdom, it would appear.

So someday we will watch Isaiah and Manasseh meet. Now that will be some experience, you know, because surely Isaiah would be candid enough to say, "Manasseh, I'll have to tell you; you're the last person I expected to find up here. But I'm thrilled that you've made it."

And Manasseh will look at Isaiah and say, "The last time I saw you, you were in two pieces. And I love seeing you in one," you know. And feeling him to see if it was well-knit in the middle. And those two could link arms and walk off together, friends again, see, because you know that no one will be in the Kingdom who cannot be trusted.

If there's someone you have decided you could never trust again in this life — and it's possible to have that experience. You've been burned so many times, you would be foolish to trust that person again. It's sad. If you meet them in the Kingdom, you know they can be trusted so have no reservations. If you see them there, all's well. Likewise, of course, if they see you there, they'll know you can be trusted. That's the beauty of it. No one will be there who can't be trusted.

Now, if we were only forgiven when we got there, I'd have to be on guard for a long time to be reassured, wouldn't you? You know, you run into Idi Amin, stamped "forgiven," but unchanged. We'd all be running, wouldn't we, in the other direction, and bump into - who knows? - other characters in history. Forgiven. Only forgiven? All Isaiah wants to know, if Manasseh can be trusted with a sharp saw. You know, want to live next door to him?

The Investigative Judgment is a great opportunity for our future neighbors and friends to talk about us as they talked about Job and others in Scripture. But it is primarily, I believe, an opportunity for the adversary to make his last effort. He doesn't accuse God, he accuses us. Now, he's done it in Scripture. He accused Joshua the High Priest. He accused Moses, Jacob, Abraham. Look at the story of Job. He accused Job before God and before the Heavenly Council. And God allows him to do this.

And then the way God responds is so reassuring to the universe. God says, "Notice who it is that feels I should judge this character on the basis of his record. That's what legalism is all about. I'm not concerned about the record that Jones has accumulated, but I'm very concerned about the kind of person Jones is right now."

And the angels say, "Well, only You can read the innermost heart. Tell us, is he really converted? Does he have a new heart and a right spirit? Would he be willing to listen?" See, if He can't say that of the thief on the cross, he's not safe to have around either. If He can say it of the thief and it be enough, that's the minimum—that's the irreducible minimum—He has to be

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able to say of every one of us as candidates to the Kingdom: "The man's record is terrible, but he's willing to listen, to accept correction. In fact you'll all need to help him a lot. The thief[?] is very ignorant."

And then his guardian angel would be pleased. Maybe, "I'll live next door to him if You like. I'd be happy to instruct him, if he's a good disciple; that is, a good student, a good pupil, willing to accept instruction and correction."

So I think our comfort in the future depends entirely, not on our being forgiven, but on our being people with new hearts and right spirits, who can be trusted with this information about each other. You know.

And the Bible is full of interesting candidates for the Kingdom. And if they've only been forgiven, there's going to be war up there, I tell you, when they get hands on each other. I mean, a manly fellow really ought to give it to David, shouldn't he? When you think what he did to Uriah and his wife. You know.

Will there be any of this in the hereafter? That will be a great miracle. And had there been time in the period, I wanted to comment on this miracle; because it's mentioned many times in Scripture.

Like John, who was a "son of thunder." How did he become the beloved Apostle who wrote more about love than anybody else? And, it's that he associated with Jesus. He marveled at His strength and force of character, and yet His gentleness in treating people. And the more John saw of this, the more he admired Jesus. And the Bible says, It's a law we become like the one we worship and admire. And over the period of years, he became like the One he so admired. And that's how this change can occur.

And I think if the stories that we looked at this evening, if they really stir one - that is, we really like them - I mean, a little healing even happens tonight. If we keep on doing this, then more and more we will become that kind of person. We'd all admit we have a way to go. But that's what God wishes us to be like. Or else there is no peace and freedom and comfort in the hereafter.

Comment: I'm wondering about the law as a Ten Commandment law, in this of thinking of it, then; was it not given before Sinai? And if not, then what will be the basis of judgment for the people before the Flood?

Maxwell: Well, strictly speaking, one isn't based by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. We often think of that because of I John 3:4, "Sin is the transgression of the law." It doesn't say that. What it says is, "Sin is anomia." Which means literally, "lawlessness." In other words, it's a rebellious, lawless spirit. Toward what law? It doesn't say which law. It doesn't make any difference. It's a bad spirit within. And the new heart and a right spirit are the change from that bad spirit to a good spirit.

So one wouldn't have to have the list, one to ten, for sin to be present in a person's life. Up in Heaven there was sin in Satan's mind, you know. And I don't know what form the Decalogue was in for angels, you see. But he had been unloving, he'd been lawless, he'd been rebellious, he'd been selfish — all those qualities. And that's the essence of sin, you see.

We so often think of sin as breaking the rules. And that's why Paul thought he was doing so well, until he took another look at the Ten Commandments and realized their essence. Because as he split them into ten and nailed them to his wall, he'd look at them in the morning and promise to keep all Ten. Come back in the evening and read the Ten, and say, "This has been a very good day. I haven't murdered anybody, I haven't stolen anything, and I haven't broken the Sabbath, because it was Wednesday anyway. I thank Thee, Lord, that I've had a good day."

Then he got to looking at #10, which says, "Thou shalt not even want to do anything wrong."

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Oh, "Then," he said, "I realize what a sinner I was. Because the essence of sin is deep down inside."

You might be piously - like the people who crucified Christ - apparently keeping the Sabbath, paying tithe, practicing health reform, quoting the Scriptures, doing all the things they did. And yet in your heart, you're a rebel.

So since the principle behind the Ten Commandments is being loving and gracious - the opposite of being rebellious and disorderly - if you violate that, then you are a sinner. That's the thing. So sin doesn't have to have the one to ten, to be described. In its essence, sin is law-less-ness. That's the word. You'll find that in many modern versions, by the way, in I John 3:4. "Sin is lawlessness."

Comment: . . . why Christ died at the cross, and that you said that the wrath of God is talking about the giving up. And that Christ— God the Father did not murder His Son while on the cross. And that's how the sinners will end in the last days. What about the statement in Great Controversy which says, "Some will be destroyed in a moment, and some will suffer for many days"?

Maxwell: Now, there are two aspects in the closing death that are described in Scripture. One is that God "pours out His wrath." Well, like in the Three Angels' Messages, you know. "His wrath is poured out without mixture." So we look up "wrath" and we find that's God sadly giving people up to the consequence as He gave up His Son.

And that was not your question. That's understandable, isn't it? But in addition, there's mentioned a fire. "Fire comes down from God out of heaven and consumes them." There's the "lake of fire." Look at all those pictures of the fire at the end. And that's in there too, isn't it?

Now, how can you fit that in with God just sadly giving us up to reap the consequences? You see. Let's take it the other way around and say, that actually, that is God kindling a fire in order to painfully exterminate those who do not love Him. And then the suggestion in Scripture that "some will have more stripes than others." That's the verse that's used for that. That's the basis for her Great Controversy comment, "Some would live longer in the fire."

If God is the stoker of the flames, and if our souls are mortal - as most of us agree — what happens when you put mortal people in fire? How quickly do they die? There's a few lung-fulls of superheated air, and you're gone. And Peter says, that fire is so hot, "the very elements melt with fervent heat." How long would you live in it? Then if the soul is mortal - for God did say, "If you sin, you'll die." And Jesus proved on the cross that sin leads to real death. He died. All right, then for some to live on in fire coming from God Himself, stoked by Him, like the people in Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace, they stoked it up seven times hotter - if God is doing it, then He is performing a miracle to keep mortal people alive in that super-heated furnace, that they might suffer. That would be in all eternity, the cruelest torture ever perpetrated. And God says, "Now, I'm doing all this because I want peace and freedom from fear in My family." It would totally contradict everything.

So reasoning back from that, I have to say, "Well, but God, You use such terms. You talk about fire, and so on." I think the only way we can tell about the death, is to go to the cross and see how Jesus died. But there was no fire. Well, He did stand in the fire on the Mount of Transfiguration a little while before, didn't He? He stood in this unveiled glory of God. And as I mentioned in earlier meetings, the glory of God is described many times in the Bible as having the appearance of fire. I mean many, many times — having the appearance of fire.

So I believe that in the Bible when you read of this fire that surrounds the Person of God - like in

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Daniel 7: "His throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire; a stream of fire issued and came forth from before Him." I mean, God doesn't have gas jets there, as on a Hollywood set, to impress us, you know. That's His life-giving glory which Moses wanted to see. And God said, "No man can see My face and live." He didn't mean, "If I catch you looking, I'll kill you." No, we can't live in that glory. The moment we sinned and placed ourselves out of harmony with God, we can no longer speak to Him face to face and see Him in His glory. And God in mercy, veiled His life-giving glory, this fiery power that surrounds Him, lest we be consumed.

Now, there comes a flood of things one could quote here, not take so long. A beautiful summary is Ellen White's comment: When Christ came to this earth in human form, Christ veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity, that human beings might come to know God without being consumed. He has veiled His glory these thousands of years in mercy, and this earth has been a dark place.

Well in the end, when He gives us up, we can neither live given up - and of course, we're the ones that have separated ourselves; and He's just acknowledged it; He's given us up - He no longer, it makes no sense any longer, to veil His life-giving glory, does it? I mean, He'd like this earth to be a bright place again. We could all live in that life-giving glory. It would be a glorifying experience. In fact, when He unveils His life-giving glory at the end of the Millennium, the saints have been living in that glory for a thousand years, haven't they — the description? It hasn't hurt anybody. It's described as life-giving glory. In mercy, we've been living in the dark all these years. In mercy.

In the end, there'll be no point to continue any longer. Everyone has made up his mind. And God sadly gives us up, unveils His life-giving glory. It isn't that He's gone away; He's there. And we'll live in that life-giving glory. But it has a very sad consequence, and He's put it off for thousands of years, until we'll be able to see it and not serve Him from fear. Are we prepared to see the wicked die, and not become scared of God? If He's going to keep them alive in the flames so they'll scream for days at His doing, I'm scared!

And I don't know when to mention this in the main auditorium. But to me, one of the most amazing moments in all eternity, will be when God says, "Children, the time has come. Do you want to come and watch? Do you want to join Me on the walls? I'm going to give My children up. And you know what's going to happen. Are you ready for it?" And then He unveils His life-giving glory, and all are consumed.

Now, if God was stoking the fires, I think He'd kill everybody as quickly as possible. If He were the executioner, He'd practice euthanasia. The evidence that it's not God doing it, is that some live longer in this life-giving glory, particularly Lucifer. And Ezekiel says, "He used to live in that life-giving glory." Isn't that true? He says, "He walked among the stones of fire. He lived as a covering cherub in Heaven."

So he's the one who lives longer at the end. God's not doing it. He's reaping a natural consequence. If we knew more about what sin does to a person - it changes us; if we knew more about the life-giving glory - we maybe could construct a formula as to why some live longer than others. I'm glad God hasn't given that to us, or we'd be calculating how long our enemies ought to get. Can't you just see us figuring that out?

He says, "Leave it up to Me. All you need to know is how I'm involved. I am not torturing My children to death. I am sadly giving them up as I gave up My Son. And since they are really out of harmony with Me, they will be consumed" by the glory of Him who is love. And we watch them being consumed until they're gone. Like the stubble in the ashes, you remember, in the books of the Bible.

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And then God will turn to His children to see if there's one flicker of fear on one face. And if He finds any fear anywhere, He did it too soon. Because if there's fear, there'll be the obedience that springs from fear. And that produces the character of a rebel. And the seeds of sin will be in the family if we're not ready to see that without being scared of God.

So that's quite a moment, when He turns to say, "Children, did I make you afraid?" And we say, "No, God. It was terrible. But we're not scared of You. And as far as its being cruel is concerned, there was no other way. There was nothing else You could do. We're right with you." Because I'd think that God crying over His children dying; and we might even comfort Him. You know, Jesus wanted to be comforted in the garden. How about all of us gathering around God and saying, "God, it's all right. We understand. You tried. There's nothing more You could have done. And above all else, of You we're not afraid." And God will know it is finished, it is done, and all is well.

That's talking in human terms, of course. The Infinite One knows. But we could say those things to Him. I think that our understanding of the death of the wicked in the end is very crucial. And that's why the Third Angel's Message is all about the destruction of the wicked. We have a message about that that's good news. The torture message is bad news. But the sadly giving up people to the consequence is sad; but it's also very good news. There is no need to be afraid of God.

I think it affects our whole understanding of the Plan of Salvation, the way we understand that thing. And of course, the demonstration of the truth about the death of the wicked, is the death of Christ. He died the death of a sinner. We should go to the cross, watch Him die, hear His cry, and note the Father never touched him. But note who did touch Him. People who served God from fear, because they didn't know God. They were His enemies.

So it really is twined into the whole understanding of God and the Plan of Salvation, to consider what you raised just now, I think.

Comment: I've been asked, "What made Lucifer sin?" How would you answer that?

Maxwell: Nothing did! And you don't need a tempter to do it, as you know from the book of James. I love that section in James. You know children who'll say, "It's not my fault; the devil made me do it." You know, or something like that.

No, it says, "When you sinned, don't blame God; you're not tempted by Him." You say, "I know what the next line is going to be: you're tempted by the devil." You know the verse. That when you're tempted - don't say you're tempted of God - you're led away by your own desires and enticed. You did it on your own.

My feeling is, that so many of us have so many bad habits, that most of the time the devil has really nothing much to do. He can relax on the sands of the Riviera and just let us go our way. It's only when you try to make a break; then he goes to work!

Comment: I don't think you understood my question.[?]

Maxwell: Well, in the beginning nobody tempted him. He was led away by his own desires. Nobody tempted him. You can originate this thing.

Comment: How did he get inspired[?]?

He created it; he did it. God created us capable of thinking up such bad things. Is that a flaw? That shows how much freedom means to God. He could have created him less capable. He could have created him only capable of thinking good thoughts. He created him equally capable of thinking other thoughts.

Then when we say, "God, I love You," it isn't because we're programmed that way. We could

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think other thoughts, and have through the years. If our children, if it was instinctive in them to say they love us, it wouldn't mean so much. That's why when children are little, to have them say, "I love you" is simply marvelous. But when your children are adults, and still say it, and they don't have to. When a little child says, "I'm going to run away at 3:00 P.M. he'll be home by 5:00. He's hungry.

But you know, when an adult child says, "I'm leaving," but comes back; or children who come back every holiday they can to see you; that's really something. They don't have to come back. They want to come back.

So God wants us to say we love and trust Him in the highest sense of freedom, knowing we can do other things; we can go other places. What do you think yourself? You know Ellen White's comment on that: "If we could explain it, we could probably excuse it." And there simply is no explanation as to how a created being, so greatly honored by God, could possibly come to the conclusions he did. It's that diabolical. But he almost became insane. You know, when someone says, "I am God," or when someone says to his Creator, "On your knees and worship me," we have kind places to confine people like that.

Comment: He doesn't have any more of an excuse than we do.

Maxwell: Yes, that's right; absolutely none. That's right. That's your feeling, isn't it? None, whatever.

Venden: That ties in with a question that came to my mind as you were coming to the end of your presentation this evening. You a couple of times said, "some of us." And I wanted to say, "Well then, why not others of us?" Would you mind commenting on that? What do you see as making the difference there, why some decide to trust and others. . . ? Is that the mystery of iniquity?

Maxwell: Well, it would be like, actually, being present when Jesus acted this way. And I suppose the classic case would be to be in the Upper Room, when God - the One worshiped by all the angels - was on His knees, washing twelve pairs of dirty feet. When we go to Communion, and that's the one time our feet absolutely don't need washing; because they're spotless, you know. And that's why some people wonder why we do it. We don't wash each other's feet because they're dirty. We wash them to remember what happened that Thursday night in the Upper Room.

And they were not humbled because they washed each other's feet; they didn't. They were humbled, eleven of them, because they realized God was washing their feet. It began to dawn on them. And eleven were so stirred, you know; and in retrospect I'm sure they were increasingly stirred as they realized the significance of it more.

But Judas, as the One he was going to betray, actually washed his dirty feet, he was moved to disgust. Because the god he worshiped would never so degrade himself. He had a different picture of God. And it was while his feet were being washed, he came to the conclusion, "I'm going to get nowhere, if I don't betray this Man." I mean, maybe this came up - was it in your sermon, or in your discussion with Clarence? Anyway, one reason why he betrayed - Oh, maybe it was last week, when the apostles were all here in the meeting with us. And we were in the Upper Room, weren't we? That was tremendous, wasn't it?

Well anyway, I understand that Judas betrayed Christ in hope that that would put Him in such a predicament, He'd have to use His power. Judas believed He had it. He believed he'd be His treasurer some day. And then he'd have his hands on unlimited funds, you know. So that's why he was utterly dismayed when Jesus would not defend Himself. And when Peter pulled his

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sword, I think Judas said, "Oh, there's some hope here maybe." And when Jesus said, "Put it back," and healed Malchus's ear, that was too much.

And then when Judas watched Jesus submit right to the end, he realized all his hopes had been dashed. He threw the money down and said, "I betrayed innocent blood; I never did think He was a crook." You know. He was utterly confused and dismayed. That's what some bad theology can do you, you know.

But now, on "some": some disciples were moved; Judas was disgusted. What made the difference? They were looking at the same Jesus. Or you think of all the many stories, even the ones we've mentioned now. Some looked at that and loved it. Some looked at it and were offended, and were disgusted.

Venden: That does raise the question of evidence and weight of evidence. And you've made a strong point of that, that we must examine the evidence. But you do come up with this powerful evidence in our Lord three and a half years. And people come even in the face of that evidence . . . Maxwell: They turn it down.

Venden: They turn it down.

Maxwell: They didn't even like it.

Venden: There's a malignancy in evil that doesn't just roll over dead in the face of evidence.

Maxwell: That's right. That's why we cannot say, I believe, that the increase of knowledge is going to secure the universe against apostasy and defection. Because that would suggest, had there been more knowledge before, there would have been no great controversy. Then the earlier angels have an excuse. We were not adequately informed.

I think all increased information, increased evidence does, is to put us in a position to make a clearer decision. That's all. You're still free to turn it down. I mean, Lucifer turned God down to His face. And he was a covering cherub. And he turned God down; standing by His side, he turned Him down!

So one could have all the knowledge in the universe. It does not make you vote Yes. You can still vote No.

Venden: Now, we have two questions; one here, and then down in front.

Comment: As I listened to your discussion tonight, comparing the element of trust and healing vs. conflict and distrust in God, you look at the man on the cross — the thief on the cross — and us at various points in our lives as we look at God develop trust. The greatest part at Christ's Second Coming will be the healing in each of our lives in the area of trust, completing that trust to the point where in the new earth, these things that we know about, you know, our friends, and so on, we can completely put them behind us and go on. That's the element of healing that's really needed, isn't it?

Maxwell: Yes, can you see this thing continuing for eternity? That is, evidence will increase, knowledge will increase. We'll know more and more about God. And we being infinite, there'd be no end to this thing. We have enough basis for trusting Him now. Certainly when we see Him come and behave the way He does, that will add confirmation. Can't put off until then, though, to decide whether we're going to trust Him or not.

Comment: But won't there be at His coming a degree of healing that we don't have now?

Maxwell: In the measure of our trust, necessarily? There's a lot of other things need to be healed.

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Comment: . . . God's part in our own lives, in our own. . .

Maxwell: Well, even physically we need a lot of healing. Mentally we need a lot of healing. Many ways we need healing. But the one thing that has to be healed, is a new heart and a right spirit. That has to be done now.

And that's why He said to Nicodemus, "Unless that happens, you'll not get into the Kingdom." He didn't say, "Unless you'll be forgiven." Or even, "Unless you be `justified'" with all the legal connotations of that word. Justified, maybe, in the right sense. "Unless, Nicodemus, you are really set right" - and to Me that means a new heart and a right spirit, "you'll not see the Kingdom."

That's the two ways of looking at it. Jesus never suggested that being forgiven would get you into the Kingdom. A new heart and a right spirit, even though a babe in the truth like the thief on the cross -- yes, all's well.

All the Bible writers agree on that. Where this other came from? Well, it has a lot to do with our understanding of the destruction of the wicked. If Hell is a given - and that's based on the immortality of the soul being a given, because if the soul is immortal and not all souls are saved, then some souls have to go to a bad place. And that's where Hell came from. That's very logical.

So the nature of man is not just an idle doctrine, you know. It's a very important one. If God meant it when he said, "You're mortal; if you sin, you'll die," and if Jesus died on the cross to say, "That's true; we really died," then that's the end of Hell. The long version, though we try to resurrect a shorter version of it: "God won't burn you forever. He'll only burn you as long as you deserve." And that doesn't improve on it very much.

But if it's rather that our problem with God is not a legal one. The problem is, that in our condition we're dying. God doesn't have to kill His dying children. Just leave them alone, and they'll die. And He doesn't want us to die. He doesn't want anyone to be lost. So he launches a whole program of salvation. And the word means "healing." It's all about healing.

Now, if you're scared stiff of God and think He is a destroyer, to relieve us of that He'll say, "Don't worry; I forgive you, I forgive you."

We say, "Well, that's good. That gets me off."

That's an emergency step, "I forgive you, I forgive you." Of course He does. He's forgiveness personified. And some settle for that. "I'm forgiven. I won't go to Hell. I'm forgiven. I'll go to Heaven. What more do I need?" The old sawdust trail; that's all there is to it.

No, it's not that. Left alone, we would die. God offers healing. But he can't heal those who don't trust Him. So we have to answer all the questions, the misgivings, meet the charges of Satan in the great controversy. And some of us are won back to trust. And if I die tonight trusting Him, all is well; because I will arise trusting Him. And whatever needs to be done, can be done then. I have nothing to worry about. So all I'm concerned about, is that I remain His trusting child, His trusting patient.

Now that trust has to be genuine, and that's shown by the way we behave, you know.

Venden: This man right here.

Comment: I used to be worried when I read about Pharaoh who "had his heart hardened." That used to bother me. But I think more now, that God gave Pharaoh opportunity to make up his mind. And not a hardening.

Maxwell: See, in a way, you could say He hardened his heart by giving him so much truth, and

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he turned it down. You know, it's like if you'd say - well, you've heard this many times; I mean, I think I've used it for forty years at least! If you take a quarter pound of butter and a quarter pound of clay and put them both in the oven and turn up the warmth; the butter will melt, the clay will turn hard. All you did was warm it up.

And God revealed Himself to Pharaoh so clearly in many ways. He demonstrated the impotence of Pharaoh's gods, and so forth, in ways that Pharaoh would understand - power, you know. And Pharaoh said, "No, No, No!" Until his heart got harder, and harder, and harder.

God precipitated that by bringing him the light. But Pharaoh actually did it to himself by saying No. And that's why in Exodus it says within one and a half inches in one column, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," "Pharaoh hardened his own heart," "Pharaoh's heart was hardened." I love the fact they're that close, because, Moses was brilliant man; he didn't forget what he'd written two lines up. So Moses himself could say, "God hardened his heart"; "he hardened his own heart"; "his heart was hardened." They're all three true.

But that's why we're told, you know, we have the keys of the Kingdom. We sometimes think we have two keys; one to Heaven and one to Hell. And when you go to visit somebody, you look them over and decide whether you want to live with them. And if you don't you get out the key to Hell. If you decide you'd like to have them, get out the key to Heaven. We have no keys to those two places!

The keys are the truth. And we almost hand it to people, and they decide which one they want to open. It's up to them. We bring the truth to people. If they vote Yes, they're won to trust: new hearts, right spirits. If they vote No, the heart gets hard, and they go the other way. And we just bring the truth. We don't open Heaven or Hell to people. We give them the key to open either one themselves. They harden their own hearts, or their hearts are softened.

It's to vote Yes or No that we're free to render. We have the power to say Yes to God. We also have power to say No; even to spit at Him and hit Him in the face. Because we did it. And God created us capable.

Very risky to run His universe that way. But if He hadn't done that, our expressions of love would be just mechanical. You know, we can get that out of a tape recorder. If that's all God wants, He could set up His tape recorder in the Most Holy Place. And, you know, maybe an hour or two every morning He likes to hear people say, "We love You, Holy, Holy; we love You, Holy, Holy." We make an idiot out of our God. He wants love that is freely given from people who know things like that cannot be forced.

Comment: If I understand correctly what you were saying is, God is not tempting us. I have a problem with translation. I read the Bible in French, in German, in Rumanian and Hungarian. In all of them, in Matthew, in the Lord's Prayer they say, "Do not bring us not into temptation?"

Maxwell: Yes. Well, the word "tempt": it's the word for "test." "Lead us not into testing or tempting." The word in itself is not evil. "Bring us not into trial. Bring us not into testing."

Now, to find a parallel to that; when Jesus Himself was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Father I shrink from this thing, this terrible trial I'm going into. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless - that's why I came - Thy will be done."

And in the Lord's Prayer, we're not so arrogant to say, "God, bring on the trial; I can take it." We don't do that. We say, "God, we shrink from it. Lead us not into trial. Nevertheless," - what do we say in the Lord's Prayer? - "Thy will be done."

So our prayer, the Pater Noster, the Lord's Prayer, is really like the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; only that was so much more earnest and serious. He said, "Deliver Me from this

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terrible thing. Nevertheless, Thy will be done."

And we don't say arrogantly, you know, "Bring it on." We say, "Spare us from it. Nevertheless, Thy will be done." And then we put other verses with it. "If trial comes, we know You'd never allow us to be tested more than we're able to bear," and lots of other verses like it. So, because "temptation" has such a bad connotation, I think "trial" would be better in the setting. "Lead us not into troubles and trials; but nevertheless, Thy will be done."

One place you could go quickly after that is Romans 5:1, where Paul says, "Now that I have a right relationship with God - I've been set right by faith - I even rejoice when my trials come. Because I know that trials produce endurance. And endurance produces character. And character produces a hope that will never let you down."

He said, "I don't invite these trials and troubles. But if they come - because I know God wouldn't let me be tested more than I'm able to bear; and I have a right relationship with Him, I know I'm at peace with Him - then I can enter these trials courageously, and I'm at peace."

So I've brought up a lot of places together. He isn't saying, "God, don't tempt me; don't tempt me." James says, "God tempts nobody."

Venden: All right.

Maxwell: You know. You remember that. I'm interested in those languages though, you know; you lucky man! You mentioned four. I imagine there's some other too.

Comment: I'm working on them.

Maxwell: Wonderful.

Venden: He can read in English too, I'm sure.

Maxwell: That's tremendous, yeah.

Venden: All right, let's bow our heads, and Dr. Maxwell . . .

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven, Once again we pause to worship Thee. And we worship Thee in the light of things we've reviewed again this evening. Particularly the three and a half years when Jesus ran such a risk to be so kind and so gracious, and to dare to represent Thee. To represent Thee in a way that we like very much. And yet Thy chosen people at that time - most of them - did not like it; did not approve of it; even denounced it as unbiblical, heretical, even satanic.

Forbid that we should come to such a conclusion. If we have been so twisted by the misrepresentations of the adversary, that we can look at those marvelous moments of Thy graciousness and not approve, and not like them; if there is any feeling within us that we wish we liked those things, then we wish Thou wouldst make those feelings grow, and lead us to approve of what is right because it is right. May our appetites be so developed, that we really like the good things. That we would not come to the conclusion that Jesus was weak, that His gentleness was weakness; but that this is the strongest force in the universe.

Help us to perceive behind it all, that though Thou art infinite in majesty and power, Thou dost wish to run this whole vast universe on the authority of the Still Small Voice of truth spoken in love.

How incredible, that One so powerful, would want to be served by friends who are not afraid. That Thou dost even invite us to inquire and ask why Thou dost do these things. That Thou art even complimented when we inquire.

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How sad, that faith should be misunderstood as to mean we should just blindly obey and never ask for the reason why. And surely, if we don't ask the reason, we'll never learn about Thee, and learn of Thy magnificent versatility and skill in using all these emergency measures; and Thy grace in doing so.

We thank Thee for the encouragement to inquire. And now may we once again take the Sixty-six books and go through, ask of every story, every teaching, every event, every problem, everything that at the moment might seem to put Thee in a bad light; and to reverently ask Thee why.

We worship Thee for being such a God, and we look forward to living with Thee in the hereafter.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, NO. 13**

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

"How God Treats His Erring Children"

Venden:Our title this evening, "How God Treats His Erring Children," raises a question in my mind, Graham. These stories that you have reminded us of, are beautiful, gripping stories.

Maxwell:You wonder how many times you can tell them, you know.

Venden:That's right.

Maxwell:Very gripping.

Venden:But they all have centered, for the most part, upon Jesus and how Jesus treated people. And I think we're fairly clear about that. We all have that image in our minds of Jesus.

Maxwell:Gentle Jesus.

Venden:Yes. Right. But I think the question still persists in many of our minds, "What if this were the Father? Would He be treating people the same way? You've covered that, but I think we must come back to that briefly once more. What about the Holy Spirit, for that matter, too.

Maxwell:So in the title, "How God Treats His Erring Children," It would be interesting to ask the whole audience who came to mind first, Father, Son or Holy Spirit? I'm hoping it won't make any difference, that we can accept the testimony of Jesus repeated in John 12:45, John 14:9, John 16\*\*\*\*\*, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." "The Father loves you just as much as I do." "And if I go, I will send another Counselor just like Myself." It would make no difference, Father, Son or Holy Spirit. That's the most wonderful thing to understand. Everybody loves Gentle Jesus, but the Father would treat us exactly the same.

Venden:But we probably have to hear that over and over again, don't we, to get it deep into the fiber of our being.

Maxwell:Yes.

Venden:By the way, this is just a little, minor thing, but over here I have noticed these various versions that you have used, but on John 20:17 there is one I've never heard of before. N-O-L-I. Noli? What translation is that?

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Maxwell:Phan S. Noli. He's a metropolitan of the Albanian Eastern Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church.

Venden:A metropolitan? Sounds like a city.

Maxwell:Yes, he's a big church leader--of a metropolis. It's an unusual version most people have never seen. I enjoy it very much. And there's a reason why I chose it. The Greek literally means, "Don't go on holding Me, don't go on touching Me, don't cling to Me, because I must go." It was very polite and gracious. But to get away from the idea that touching would have made any difference, I love the translation, "Do not detain me." Plus the fact that in Desire of Ages, this was Ellen White's choice, "Detain Me not." So I went thorough my many versions and Noli had it the way I wanted it.

Venden:In your presentation you had all kinds of stories, beautiful stories and so appropriate particularly to this weekend, it seems. But most of them are from the New Testament. What does this mean?

Maxwell:They are all from the New Testament, but Hosea, aren't they?

Venden:Yes. Now is God, as He is revealed in Jesus in the New Testament, really more gentle than in the Old Testament?

Maxwell:The only remedy for that is to go through the Sixty-six, it seems to me, and note how much tenderness there is in the Old Testament. Things you've preached on many times. God in His vineyard. I mean, how tenderly that is told; "What more could I do for you?" Or "How have I wearied you, My people?" Of course, the whole book of Hosea is so moving. Or elsewhere, God says, "Anyone who touches you, touches the apple of My eye," sometimes translated, "Anybody who hurts you, My people, sticks his finger in the eye of the Almighty." That would hurt. And God says, "That's the way I feel about you."

One of the most impressive, though, is God's treatment of David. Now David sinned enough to be disfellowshipped periodically from this University Church, and yet God says to his son Solomon, "Solomon, obey Me in all things, just as you father David did." Now that's one of the most generous things in the whole Bible, so I want to use it when we talk about the subject of perfection.

Venden:Graham, here you referred to this beautiful scene in the New Testament, in John 8, where a woman is brought, taken in adultery, and Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you." But you go back to the Old Testament, and you have God ordering the destruction, and the death of Achan and his family. Why would there be that discrepancy or that apparent difference? And I think that if He had agreed that the woman taken in adultery should be stoned, He would have had a large following. They would have approved of this.

One explanation I have heard is that Achan did not repent, and so he had to be stoned.

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The woman taken in adultery did repent, which raises the interesting question: Had she not repented, would Jesus have joined in stoning her? I don't think so! No, I'd rather put it in the total setting. In the case of Achan, there was irreverence, there was lack of trust, they were about to go into Canaan. God was saying something different there. And it's true, there was not much repentance on his part, if any. With the woman taken in adultery, the situation was different. It called for Him to say something else. His gracious treatment of this woman who had been taken advantage of, and His incredibly gracious treatment of those pretentiously pious accusers. That's what needed to be said at the time, and everything God does in Scripture is designed to say something that needs to be said at that time. And when you take the Bible as a whole, you see a consistency in it.

Venden: Well, now would you apply that to the fact that this gentleness, this wonderful acceptance of everyone, really--I love the way you emphasize that His acceptance of the woman, but not only the woman, these accusers, I want to...

Maxwell: There is something there.

Venden: If I went with that, you see,...

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: But here He is so gentle with them. Now that's a picture of His ministry for three and a half years and then, for instance, in the early church you have Ananias and Sapphira.

Maxwell: Yes. He hasn't stopped doing things that way.

Venden: That's right.

Maxwell: And the third angel's message is fire and brimstone.

Venden: So why couldn't God act in the same way, consistent with those three and a half years throughout the whole Biblical period.

Maxwell: As I understand it, those three years were an incredible demonstration of God's ideal way of doing things. This is the way He would like to do it all the time. Now, it wasn't well received by many. Some despised Him for being so gentle. He was gentle with everybody. Gentle with Judas. Gentle with the men who nailed Him to the cross. This is the way God wishes to act for all of eternity. And He was demonstrating that you can only govern that way when the people you are governing are impressed favorably with that and will respect you and not misunderstand this as weakness.

Venden: Well then, this ties in with what you have talked about before, that when God doesn't act in that way, we're in emergency situations where the uniqueness of the situation calls for an action appropriate to that situation which still is based upon love.

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Maxwell:That's right. That's why I love to keep going though the Sixty-six to see the consistency there. God all the way through is trying to say and demonstrate what needs to be said under varying circumstances to the whole universe looking on.

Venden:But then, when God comes in Jesus Christ and acts this marvelous way of acceptance, we still take Him out and crucify Him.

Maxwell:Yes, they didn't respect Him for this. They would have respected Him more if He had said, "Let's stone that woman, and I'll throw the first stone."

Venden:They really didn't want the picture,...they didn't want the kind of God that Jesus said God was, that God is.

Maxwell:That's right. They even said He was possessed of a devil to so describe God. (John 8:48)

Venden:Incredible!

Maxwell:It is incredible. Yet He wept as He denounced them for doing this.

Venden:This question has come up again and again: If God is so kind, and if in looking at Jesus we see God as the way He wants to act all the time, how can He turn and destroy sinners in the end?

Maxwell:Yes, that question has arisen so many times throughout our series.

Venden:It keeps coming in again, people may be waiting for that answer.

Maxwell:Yes. If all God wants really is love and trust freely given, He can't say, "You give Me that, or I'll destroy you." So that leads me to go back to the Bible and try to understand what He means when He says, "I will destroy." Just one example, when Saul committed suicide, the Bible said, "Thus God slew Saul." (1 Chronicles 10:14) God never laid a hand on him! And then, of course, the cross. Jesus died as sinners will die, and God did not destroy His Son.

So I think we can find a consistent meaning through there. God uses the word "destroy," language we can understand when we are hard of hearing and have to be almost terrified to take Him seriously, but actually, if we want to know what He will do to the wicked in the end, look what happened to His Son. He died the death of a sinner.

Venden:So the many biblical references about God destroying, then you're saying, mean just what?

Maxwell:I want to know what He's going to do particularly to me if I'm a lost sinner in the end. And the Bible says, "He made His Son to be sin, though He knew no sin," (2

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Corinthians 5:21) and He died the sinner's death. So I should go to the cross and watch Jesus die the sinner's death.

Venden:And there's the central meaning of "destroy."

Maxwell:Yes. Of course, it's absolutely devastating, but God isn't taking you by the scruff of the neck and saying, "Since you've chosen not to love Me and trust Me, I am going to kill you as painfully as I know how."

Venden:That takes us to another question that I have seen probably eight or nine times on the cards that people have handed in, so it's a widespread concern: Are you saying that God never really then kills anyone, and if you are, then I'm going to say, or at least many of our congregation have said, What about the Flood?

Maxwell:No, I believe God has put many of His children to sleep in what the Bible calls the first death--the sleep-death. And of course He promises them all resurrection. And none of us can do that if we should take someone's life. But for the Life-giver to interrupt a person's life--and he's not aware that he's asleep--God awakens him in the resurrection, hopefully the right one, although many will arise in the other one. Yes, I would see God doing that, but taking away our eternal life in the end, that destruction at the end, is not at His hands. That's when He leaves us, gives us up to the awful consequences and cries as He gives us up as He does in Hosea. But the difference between the first and the second death is a very biblical distinction.

Venden:That crucial difference is what you are suggesting as the answer to this question.

Maxwell:Yes, very much so.

Venden:This is a bit of a footnote, but just this week someone raised the question about the story that you spent a bit of time on, the woman taken in adultery, and she said that she had tried to find it in her Bible and looked in John and it wasn't there. Why is that?

Maxwell:That's right.

Venden:Now how is that? I have noticed that in a couple of the versions that I have as well.

Maxwell:That would be a serious loss. It's one of the greatest stories. It is absolutely unique in the Bible. It is true, in the earliest Manuscripts, it's missing. Where it does appear sometimes is John 7:53 to 8:11. Sometimes it's at the end of John. One Manuscript has it in Luke. The agreement of scholars is they're not quite sure where it belongs. But lest we be disheartened, scholars agree there is no way anybody would have made up such a story. It ran so counter to the thinking of the day, and as Sir Frederick Kenyon once said, there is no way some monk in a monastery would have thought up a story like this where God would be so generous to an immoral woman!

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So the general agreement is, the story bears all the earmarks of genuineness. So, let's leave it where it is. But some versions don't have it in the footnote. They leave it out entirely. I would say to people, don't give up too soon. Look in the footnote, then look at the end of John, then look at the Appendix before you decide it's not there.

Venden: So this is a question of manuscripts that has to do with where it appears, not really so much a question of whether is the a story a faithful representation of Jesus.

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

Venden: Now you've suggested and I hope that everyone has read these first paragraphs in our Bible Reference Sheet, because I think they are so important for the setting, but here in the second paragraph in your presentation, you referred to the fact that we'll be comfortable with God. You asked the question, "Would we be comfortable, knowing that we are in the presence of Someone who knows everything about us?"

Maxwell: In mercy, maybe things we may have forgotten ourselves.

Venden: There are no hiding places. Now you've suggested that we'll be comfortable with God, not because God has forgotten all this, and yet God has references in Scripture about how God has taken all our sins and He has put them in the depths of the sea and He will remember them no more. Wouldn't it be more reassuring to say, "Well, He has blotted them out and they just don't figure into any recollection whatsoever?"

Maxwell: Yes, I think some derive more comfort from the thought that God will be unable to remember--some kind of divine amnesia--that none of our neighbors and friends, especially our guardian angels, will be able to remember. I think it shows more trust in God to understand that He can remember very well, but He would never haunt us with this memory.

Now a vital reason for not forgetting--the history of the great controversy is the history of the evidence upon which God has won that conflict. After He has won it, He will not destroy the evidence, or the conflict could arise again and again and again. And this is why Jesus is pictured as keeping His human form. It would destroy Harry Anderson's wonderful picture of that little girl sitting in Jesus' lap, and she picks up Jesus' hand and says, "How did You get this mark?" And He says, "I don't know. I'm hoping somebody can tell Me some day." There's no point in His keeping His human form if the whole thing has been forgotten. Moreover, when you think of what would be required, the sins of many saints who will be up there have been recorded in Scripture. Think how many sermons we have preached on David's sins. In order for all record of sin to be forgotten, all Bibles would have to be destroyed, all memory of it's contents. The Fifty-first Psalm would have to go, that beautiful prayer for a new heart and a right spirit. You think of all that would be gone.

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Venden: So then you're saying these statements about our sins being "blotted out" and "in the depths of the sea," and so on, are God's way of reassuring us that though He knows us that well, He loves us and accepts us just as though we had never sinned.

Maxwell: We say "Forgive and forget." Now, evidence for that, my mother knew me very well as nobody else did, you know. And when I was invited to come down here in 1961, she could have come before the Board and said, "You don't know about my son. Let me tell you some of the things he has done." I knew my mother would rather die than say such a thing! I knew my reputation was absolutely secure with my mother and with my father. Well, if our reputation is secure is with our parents, our reputation is totally secure with God.

Venden: I must ask just another tangential question here, though. My concern isn't just with God remembering. What about our remembering, Graham?

Maxwell: No one would be admitted to the hereafter who cannot be entrusted with a memory of other people's sins, a memory of David's sins and so forth. God does not want us going up to Rahab and saying, "Hey, tell us a little. What was it like before you met the two spies?" That's why in the middle of the list of sins in Romans 1, dreadful sins, right in the middle is the sin of gossiping. And there's a marvelous verse. I wish there had been room on the sheet. I copied it out. In 1 Timothy 5:13, Paul talks about people who go about from house to house learning to be idle and not only idle but gossips and busybodies and talking of things they ought not to mention. He said, "Don't worry, they won't be in the Kingdom." Well, they would make life a misery for every one of us. There will be no mimeograph machine operator up there spreading the bad news about the things the rest of us have done.

Venden: I want to press you just a little bit further. I'm not thinking so much of the other person and my recollection of what he or she may have done. I'm thinking about the burden of my memory and things I'd like to forget.

Maxwell: Oh, I think that would involve some conversations with the Lord which would be so good, and God would say, "Look, I'm not thinking about them; why are you? Don't worry." You know. "Well, I was afraid You might bring it up." "Really? No, not a chance."

Venden: There's a sense that I will be praising Him throughout eternity that He is that kind of a God? \*\*\*\*\*

Maxwell: ...In knowing what it meant. Absolutely! And time is so healing, isn't it. You've probably never had an enemy in your life, but I know people who have had enemies who have become their best friends. And you never remember those unpleasant occasions, you know? I think of a person or two that I feel may have hurt me that I am now on very good terms with. We never think of that anymore. You're almost better friends. That's why David and Uriah can meet and not come to blows, you know.

Venden: We've had several other questions that have come in, so we must press on.

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Someone has asked: Why did Jesus heal the paralytic on the Sabbath? Now we're moving a bit to some of the material from last week, particularly on our discussion in Fellowship Hall. So many centered around the meaning of the Sabbath. Why did Jesus?...

Maxwell: Many of His healings were elective, weren't they? The paralytic had been there thirty-eight years.

Venden: Not a critical emergency.

Maxwell: Not at all, you see. I think Jesus tried to keep a low profile most of the time. He knew if He became very public, He was so controversial, He wouldn't last very long. And indeed He didn't when He became very conspicuous. But when it came to the Sabbath, He risked His life repeatedly to clear the Sabbath of misunderstanding. Because an arbitrary approach to the Sabbath puts the Father in the worst possible light. And so to clear this up, He ran the risk of doing healing, helping things on the Sabbath. And He ran into trouble every time. It evidently is that important to redeem the Sabbath of arbitrariness, because the Sabbath speaks so eloquently of God, for good or ill.

Venden: Here's another very important question that has been asked: In the parable of the prodigal son, the father just forgives. No one has to die. There is no sacrifice or animal that has to be killed, or the Father doesn't have to die. Why couldn't God forgive in that same way His erring children?

Maxwell: Well, in a way He does. I think the story was told to say that absolutely nothing had to be done to persuade the father to love his son and forgive him. I believe the father had forgiven the son long before the son headed for home. But that's not the whole story in the great controversy. God is forgiveness personified, but questions have been raised. God has been accused, and these questions must be answered. Satan's charges must be met. Any misunderstanding as to the consequence of sin, the seriousness of sin, all this must be handled. And that's why more had to be done. But between God and His sinful children, nothing needs to be done to win the Father to our side, to assuage His wrath before He will forgive. That's a very sad thing to say. The story of the prodigal son speaks more about the Father than the Son, doesn't it? We call it the story of the prodigal son. It's the story of a father who was so delighted that he came home, he didn't even have to finish his speech of repentance.

Venden: Several folks wanted you to tell the rat poison story, the illustration that you used last week, and to underline again the difference between a legal approach to this and the larger view that we've been talking about through our series.

Maxwell: Since time is brief, just to give the essence of it, the difference is this. The father says to the son, "I have rat poison out in the garage. I don't want you to touch it. It would be fatal to you." Why would it be fatal? Now calling it poison slants the story in one direction immediately, you see. But in the legal way of approaching the plan of salvation, the father says to the son, "If I catch you taking that poison, if you drink that

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poison, the punishment is that I'll kill you." And father hears the son falling in the garage. He runs in there, and he has drunk the poison and he's dying. And the father says, "The punishment is that I'll kill you." And the boy says, "Please forgive me." And the father says, "Well yes, son, I love you, so I'll forgive you." The trouble is, being poisoned, he dies anyway.

The legal model has real trouble conceiving of sin as a poison in itself, that sin is intrinsically bad. In the other model, the father says to his son, "Don't touch the poison, I don't want you to die." He runs out to the garage. The boy is dying. Forgiveness would not keep the boy from dying. The boy needs an antidote. If only he'd trust his father enough, there is an antidote. The father could heal him. That's the difference. Is the death from sin an imposed penalty because we have offended the One in charge? Or is the death that comes from sin the result of poisoning ourselves with this thing? We don't need forgiveness so much as we need a healing antidote. And if we trust God, He can heal the damage done. And that's the difference between the two, that sin is a poison.

Venden: That seems like an absolutely pivotal understanding, really, and the difference that that makes in terms of how God views sin and why God hates sin. It isn't just His personal opinion.

Maxwell: No! He doesn't want us to die!

Venden: He doesn't want us to die.

Maxwell: And certainly He wouldn't kill His dying Son, would He? Would He say, "Hey, don't die too quickly, because I have to kill You as a penalty." Doctors don't kill their dying patients, and God does not kill His dying children.

Venden: Back to the prodigal son model and the question that comes out of that: Is it necessary to repent and to confess before one is forgiven?

Maxwell: Ah. The boy hardly started it when the father said, "I forgave you long ago." But the most stunning illustration of that is Jesus forgiving on the cross. There was no indication that the soldiers who were nailing Him to the cross were saying, "Please forgive us; please forgive us."

Venden: They didn't even ask.

Maxwell: They didn't even ask, and He says, "I forgive you anyway." (Luke 23:34) And that's the idea that God is forgiveness personified. But that does us no good unless we hear, unless we accept, unless we are moved by His forgiveness to repent. We always have it the other way around, "If I repent, maybe He will forgive me." No, when I learn of His forgiveness, that moves me to repentance--some of us, anyway. That's the kindness of God leading us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) Now this doesn't leave out repentance. If I don't respond to His gracious forgiveness which would be in terms of changing my mind and confessing and saying, "I am sick, help me, what must I do to be well?" Then

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it doesn't do me any good.

Venden: So the difference here is whether we set out by our repentance and confession to win God over to where if we make a good speech, maybe He would be willing to forgive us. And Him saying, "Well, all right, since you feel that badly about it," and the father saying to the prodigal son, "Well if you have made all these promises, then maybe I'll welcome you home."

Maxwell: You see, on the serious level, again I want to be very reverent in saying it, if it requires that I bring the blood of His Son to God before God can say, "Well, now I can forgive you," that denies the prodigal son story."

Venden: That's true.

Maxwell: Yes, that's sad. You don't have to bring Him anything. But God sent His Son to die to answer all those questions and to draw us to Him, to handle all the emergencies in the great controversy. Because He had forgiven us, but we didn't know it. He sent the Son to make it clear. And the Son hanging on the cross said, "I forgive you. You don't understand what you're doing." That's incredible! That wins some to repentance. That won the thief.

Venden: As we move on to number fourteen, what's our topic for number fourteen? Tell us just a bit about where we're going next in our series.

Maxwell: "God Can Completely Heal The Damage Done." It was really talking about perfection which has probably given many people hypertension and ulcers and been very discouraging. In the Bible, perfection is not a requirement. Perfection is an offer. Do you want to be well or not? How well do you want to be? The message of perfection, instead of being forbidding, is very relieving good news. And that's the way I would like to discuss it.

Venden: In addition to the wonderful treatment that God gives us, "how He treats His erring children," He goes on then to heal.

Maxwell: "Let Me heal all the damage done." And you say, "Well, don't heal me that well; half-way maybe. In fact, I don't think You can heal me perfectly.

Venden: We'll look forward, then to number fourteen.

Maxwell: Two weeks from tonight.

Venden: Yes, that's right.