

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER SIXTEEN

GOD'S LAST PLEADING WITH HIS CHILDREN

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"God's Last Pleading with His Children"--another look at the three angels' messages of Revelation 14--in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God.

In the last of the sixty-six books, the war that began up in heaven is described as culminating in three final messages of warning and invitation--all sent from a Heavenly Father who wants none of His children to be lost. The first angel speaks of the everlasting good news and calls on people everywhere to make up their minds about their Creator. What is this good news, this eternal truth that has always been and will forever remain the foundation of our trust in God? Can we, like Paul, be so convinced about this truth that not even an angel from heaven could persuade us otherwise? (Galatians 1)

The second angel speaks of the final collapse of Satan's opposition in corruption and defeat. The third describes the inevitable consequence of preferring Satan's lies to the everlasting truth. The third angel's message is the most fearsome in all the Bible, and the enemy would have us misunderstand it as the words of an angry God. But all the previous books of Scripture have prepared us to understand the terrible consequence of sin, and how God would do anything to spare His children. For one last time our Heavenly Father--the One who would so much rather speak to us gently of the truth--raises His voice in awesome warning and appeal: "If you are bent on leaving Me, I must let you go!"

We could trust the God we worship to send these three final messages to the world. In these last days before the end, He would not leave His children unenlightened and unwarned. And behind the fearsome wording of the third angel's message stands the God of Hosea crying, "Why will you die? How can I give you up! How can I let you go!"

Welcome to the sixteenth 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 topic of our conversation this time is "God's Last Pleading with His Children"--an opportunity to consider again the meaning and the purpose of the messages of the three angels in Revelation 14. As you may recall, the very first Bible reference which we talked about was from this 66th book, the book of Revelation. It was Revelation 12 where we find the apostle John's description of the war that began up in heaven. The conflict of distrust that led one third of the brilliant and intelligent angels to rebel against God.

But this same book of Revelation that describes the beginning of the war also speaks of its end--of the final resolution of this conflict of distrust--including the second coming of Christ and the restoration of this damaged planet of ours to its original beauty and peace. The book also tells us that some great and terrible events stand between us and that full restoration. We could trust the God we worship and admire not to leave His children unenlightened and unwarned. So we have this picture of three angels bringing three messages from heaven. They are pictured as proclaiming, each one of them, a special message of warning and invitation.

First look at Revelation 14:6-12. These are familiar words. I wondered which version to use. I chose the *New International Version* this time.

"Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the springs of water.'

"A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.' This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus."

Now as you look over those three messages, there are many terms that call for explanation, but they are all discussed elsewhere in the Bible. That is why we really need all previous 65 books to understand the 66th. Some of these terms, you may recall, we discussed in earlier conversations--such as the first word of the first angel--**fear**...fear God. You recall from our conversation "**There is No Need to be Afraid of God**", that when the context so indicates, this is not "terror". This is "reverence". This could be translated--"revere God", or "honor God". Surely with the angel bringing **good** news, he wouldn't bring the good news that we should be terrified of God. So a number of versions have ventured to translate it this way, and I would agree with them. They say, "Honor God", "Reverence God." That can indeed be the meaning of "fear".

Surely there is much fearsome wording in these three angels' messages. If this is God's last pleading with His children, would it be better perhaps to have just the first angel's message, and then the last sentence of number three? If this is pleading with us to trust Him, might it have been better to just have it say, "Honor God. Give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the springs of water," then go straight to, "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus?" Why do we need all that fearsome wording in between? Wouldn't that have seemed more like pleading?

Of course, we must note the sequence of what has gone before, particularly Revelation 12, 13, and then 14. You recall that Chapter 12 describes the war and all the efforts of Satan to deceive both angels and men. Then Chapter 13 describes Satan's final efforts to deceive which is the subject for our next conversation. In that effort, Satan is primarily seeking to deceive the people living on this planet. The thirteenth chapter describes Satan's almost complete success. The "whole world" worships him, except for a certain few. It even describes the powers and the organizations that Satan works through in order to accomplish his deceptive purposes. These powers and organizations are represented by certain symbols in the customary biblical way that we are familiar with. More than that, near the end of Chapter 13 that describes his final campaign, his loyal followers are pictured as bearing a certain mark of their preference for him and their trust in him. That mark is notoriously known as the "mark of the beast".

Then comes the 14th chapter--God's Last Pleading with His Children. The three final messages of warning and invitation that are the subject of our conversation this evening. Knowing what has gone before, one is not so surprised to find the fearsome words of warning in the second and third angel's messages. But we should always note when we read these three, that the first angel comes with good news. He comes with the everlasting gospel. As you know, gospel means good news. Notice that he doesn't come with new information. God's last appeal is not something new. It is not something additional. It is the everlasting good news. For this good news has always been the truth. It will always remain the truth. It will always remain the basis of our faith, trust, and freedom for eternity.

What could so important a message be? What is this eternal gospel--this eternal good news? Surely no one was more confident that he knew the content of the gospel than the apostle Paul. On one occasion when his version of the good news was being challenged--rather seriously challenged by some of his own colleagues--Paul made this extraordinary claim recorded in Galatians 1:8,9 (NEB). "If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. I now repeat what I have said before; if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast!" Now if the apostle's language should seem too strong, this rendering in the *New English Bible* is the mildest I could find. Gentle, clergyman, Phillips over in England translated, "May he be a damned soul!" The Greek is **anathema esto**--"may he be anathema". *The Good News Bible* produced by the American Bible Society translates, "May he be condemned to hell!" *The Living Bible*, "Let God's curse fall upon him!" The *King James Version* translated, "Let him be accursed!" The *New International Version* translates, "May he be eternally condemned!" When do we say that about our fellow human beings?

To say the least, Paul was profoundly convinced of the rightness of his version of the good news and also convinced of the dire consequences of perverting the truth and turning to another gospel. You recall how Romans 1 describes the dire consequences of turning away from the truth to another version.

Paul was stunned to observe the willingness of so many early Christians, who had so recently been set free--and what a relief it was--from the meaningless requirements of false religion, to go back once again to the indignity and the fear and the bondage of their former ignorance and misinformation about God. He speaks of this in Galatians 1:6,7 (NEB). "I am astonished to find you turning so quickly away...and following a different gospel. Not that it is in fact another gospel; only there are persons who unsettle your minds by trying to distort the gospel of Christ." He goes on to ask how they could possibly be so foolish, when they compared the good news they had just received with what he had led them to give up. Look at Galatians 3:1 (GNB) "You foolish Galatians! (I love the way Phillips translates that. He says, "Oh, you dear idiots of Galatia." Now you notice that it is **dear** idiots. He loved them, but they were being so foolish) Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross!" (parentheses supplied) Do you notice how he relates the cross to the gospel? Note these terms recurring. They give us what the essence of the gospel might be. He continues reasoning with them in Galatians 4:8,9 (GNB). "In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods. But now that you know God...how is it that you want to turn back?" This time he is relating **the knowledge of God** to the **good news** and to **the cross**. They are all about the same subject.

Paul is sympathetic with them, for what could be expected of new converts when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem were themselves contradicting and compromising the gospel of Christ, as described in Acts 21. Even Peter, after his broadening experience with

Cornelius reverted to some of his narrow views that he used to hold. Paul was moved to correct Peter to his face and in public, as recorded in Galatians 2. How could Paul feel right about doing that? This is the Paul who wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that "love is never rude. Love never insists on having its own way". This is the Paul who wrote in Romans 14 that he was so respectful of other people's freedom that when there was disagreement over this and that religious matter, he would say, "Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind," and "who are you to criticize one another?" (Rom. 14:4,5)

But when it came to the good news, and those who would suppress it or pervert it, gentle Paul spoke out with almost frightening conviction and power. He even went so far as to suggest that these legalistic agitators were confusing the new saints about the good news of truth and freedom. They were upsetting the new converts by urging them to adopt once again such ceremonial requirements as circumcision and other legalistic details like that. He said, "I wish they would go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves." That is Galatians 5:12 (NEB), if you want to look it up. You know that Paul would have to be deeply moved to say that about those legalistic agitators. In fact, if you have the *Jerusalem Bible*, you might like to look up Galatians 5:12, where Paul said, "Tell those who are disturbing you and confusing you about the good news of freedom, tell them, 'I would like to see the knife slip'". Paul was pretty stirred to talk like that.

Well, what is this good news of which Paul was so sure and which through the centuries has provoked such opposition and has been so misunderstood? What did Paul consider so serious a contradiction and perversion that he could be moved to speak so strongly to the Galatian believers? Through the years I have asked many Christians what they consider to be the essence of the good news. I wish there was time to go around our group tonight and have everyone say, "I believe the good news is this:" Through the years, I think the replies have included almost every part of the Christian faith. But most particularly subjects like the atonement, the second coming, or eternal life. Although, if God is as His enemies have made Him out to be, eternal life would be misery, would it not? So whether these doctrines, even the second coming, are good news depends on the kind of person we believe our God to be.

I regard as the most fitting, appropriate and truest answer to that question this answer that a good friend gave me years ago: "**The good news is that God is not the kind of Person Satan has made Him out to be.**" Now, that the good news should be related to the issues in the great controversy, is perhaps suggested by Paul's reference to the angel from heaven. He said, "If even an angel from heaven should come with a different version of the good news, don't believe him. He is wrong. Let him be outcast! Let him be accursed! (Gal. 1:8,9)

Now this would at first seem incredibly dogmatic, almost arrogant for Paul to speak like that. What if the pastor at the end of his sermon this week-end should say, "If anyone of you in the audience should disagree with my sermon, let him be held outcast! Let him be condemned to hell!" We would think that perhaps the pastor was in need of a rest. But what about Paul talking like this?

Well, was it not an angel from heaven--right from heaven--who began the circulation of misinformation about our God? Is it not an angel from heaven who masquerades as an angel of light as he seeks to deceive you and me and turn us against our God? We discussed this verse in 2 Corinthians 11:14. Throughout this series we have spoken of Satan's charges, that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, severe, and has even lied to us that sin results in death, a selfish God who is not worthy of our love and trust. He is certainly not respectful of our freedom. We have considered God's reply at some length, not in claims, but in demonstration.

You remember how humbly God took His case into court, the court being the family of the universe. You remember the good news is that God has won His case. The whole universe agrees that Satan has lied about our God. "It is finished", Jesus said. By the life that He lived and the unique and awful way in which He died, Jesus demonstrated the righteousness of our God and answered any questions, and met any accusations leveled against Him. Paul said he was proud to be a bearer of this good news. More than that, he knew what it was all about. Look, for example, at 1 Corinthians 1:17,18 (GNB) for the substance of his good news. "Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the **Good News**...(What is the good news?) For the message about **Christ's death on the cross** (That is the good news) is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is **God's power**." (Parentheses supplied.) Note how he combines the good news with Christ's death, with power. Now put with that the familiar verse in Romans 1:16,17 (RSV). "For I am not ashamed of **the gospel** (the good news); it is **the power of God** for salvation...For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed." (Parentheses supplied.) Notice how the good news, power, God's righteousness, and the cross are all tied together.

There is nothing new about this. It is the everlasting good news. To pick just one place in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 9:24 (NIV). "Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord."

Now combine them all together. The good news is about God. It's about His righteousness. It cost the death of Christ to prove it. This good news about God's righteousness has great power to move people (if they are willing to listen) to win them back to repentance and faith. It has great power because it is the truth. It has great power because it is such good news.

That is the meaning of Romans 3:25,26 (Maxwell) that we discussed at more length before. Forgive me for putting in my own translation. I just cannot find one that does it right, in my opinion. "For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation (unity, at-one-ment, peace, the opposite of war)...This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness...To show that He Himself is righteous (and not as His enemies have made Him out to be) And because He is righteous and trustworthy, He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus." Now Paul confessed with shame that formerly he had misrepresented God. Even to the extent of believing Satan's lies so that he would use force and persecution, even stoning, to compel people to obey. But after Paul accepted the good news, he devoted the rest of his life to telling the truth. Who has written more eloquently about freedom, about love, about trust--that all God asks of us is trust, that we are not under law, but under grace, and there is no need to be afraid of God? Paul had learned the truth about God that sets His children free.

You remember Jesus' words in John 8:32 (Williams). "You will know the truth (And with Jesus, it is always the truth about His Father) and the truth will set you free." (Parentheses supplied) You see, if God were the kind of person Satan has made Him out to be, there would be no freedom. There would only be the bondage of fear. But Paul had learned the truth and now he took it everywhere he could. He took it to the Galatians. And when he took the truth, he took freedom to them. He noticed they loved it at first. Then they turned away from it. He tells them to stand fast in this freedom. Look at Galatians 5:1 (Williams). "This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again."

Now there had been a day when Paul himself was satisfied with the obedience that

resulted from law and fear. He thought it was the right thing to do. He thought that was what the sovereign God preferred. But now Paul knows the good news. He knows the truth. He realizes that God does not want the obedience that springs from law and fear. He wants the obedience of faith. The obedience that comes from free people who agree with God that this is the right thing to do. They agree so fully, they don't even need to be told to do so. They do what is right because they agree it is right.

Look again at Paul's understanding of his commission in Romans 1:4,5 (Weymouth). This is the theme that runs through the whole book. If there was more room, I would have liked to start earlier, for at the beginning of this paragraph, Paul says, "I have been called to make known God's good news about Him and about His Son." Then he goes on with the words in verse 4. "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom I have received grace and a commission for His Name's sake to win men to the obedience that springs from faith." Not the obedience that springs from law, but the obedience that springs from faith.

What produces this obedience that springs from faith? Is it not the good news about our God--the kind of person He is, what He wants of us, how infinitely worthy He is of our love and trust, and how highly He values our freedom. That leads us to a willingness to listen--the meaning of obedience. It leads to loyalty. It leads to Revelation 14:12. "Here are they who keep God's commandments and maintain their loyalty to Him and to His Son."

So the first angel comes with the everlasting gospel...the everlasting good news. What is it? Well, everyone ought perhaps to state His own version. I had the privilege of putting it on the back of the invitation to these conversations about God. I wrote, **"The Good News is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be--arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. Jesus said, 'If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.' God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son--just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious person who values nothing higher than the freedom, the dignity, and the individuality of his intelligent creatures, that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting good news that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe."**

Could you be dogmatic about that? That is the only truth that it is safe to be dogmatic about! To be like Paul and say, "Even if an angel came with a different picture of God, it is wrong, and I will not believe it." To me this is not a negotiable position. You see, one can be adamant, immovable, and dogmatic about freedom, because you never hurt anybody with that view. You are immovably committed to freedom, and to the picture of God as valuing nothing higher than the freedom of His children. To me, that is the essence of the message of the first angel.

So the second angel comes and simply says, "The opposition has collapsed in corruption and defeat." The third angel warns of the inevitable consequence of preferring Satan's lies to this magnificent truth. It is true that the third angel's message has the most fearsome wording in the whole Bible. I am sure the devil would have us misunderstand these words as the words of an angry God. But all the previous books of Scripture have prepared us to understand the terrible consequences of sin. We have watched Jesus die. We have read the description. We know how God would do anything to spare His children. We have been prepared all through Scripture, story after story, to see our Heavenly Father, the One who would so much prefer to speak gently to us of the truth--we could trust Him to do so--raising His voice one last time in these messages of warning and invitation.

The God we worship would never allow us to pass through these closing events, unenlightened and unwarned. We have also been prepared to understand that behind the fearsome warning of the third angel's message, there stands the God of Hosea crying, "How can I give you up? Why will you die? How can I let you go?" Remember that the one who wrote the awesome words of the third angel, wrote the text, 1 John 4:16,18 (Williams), "God is love...There is no fear in love." Remember that the apostle, John, the beloved disciple, who knew all about love, and that there is no need to be afraid, wrote the fearsome words of the third angel's message, because he understood.

Now, as Christians, loyal members of the family, we all remember Christ's commission in Matthew 24:14 (GNB). "This Good News about the Kingdom (and especially about the way the King runs His kingdom) will be preached through all the world...and then the end will come." (Parentheses supplied)

Could you conceive of any higher honor or pleasure, or privilege, than to join with the loyal angels in making this good news known to all the world--this everlasting truth about our God?

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Conversations About God - Tape 16B

Venden: I think, Graham, you have a question that ties in with one that we tried to cover--you took up this evening. But maybe it would be helpful to say a bit more about it, and then we'll go to questions from the floor.

Maxwell: OK. This is so related to the evening, and we did discuss it a bit; but you could ask more about it. The question is: "I have a sincere Christian friend of Evangelical faith--and that word Evangelical means they espouse the gospel--that's based on "Euangelian" the Good News.

By the way, it's important to recognize the verb "Euangelizamise," to evangelize. An evangelist is a "euangelistes." So if the preacher is not telling good news, he is being something other than an evangelist at the moment. It means, to tell good news. Would that mean an evangelist couldn't preach the Third Angel's Message, in that case? Though there must be good news about it.

Well, "I have a sincere Christian friend of Evangelical faith, who believes we should take the Bible as it reads; including the third angel. The text you used in front tonight wouldn't disturb their verbatim acceptance of the word at all. What examples do you suggest I use with them?" That's very fair. What to do that would be helpful in a case like this?

I do like to point to other passages. And I mentioned earlier, Jude talks about Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed with eternal fire. And no one suggests that it's still burning. It would depend on who the friend was, and what the background is. If the friend had some technical knowledge here, you could even discuss the fact that the Greeks and the Hebrews never conceived of an endless age. "Forever" wasn't that long. Even "forever and ever" wasn't that long.

And that's why when you read that the saints will have eternal life, that's not long enough. That might only be a few years, you see. Like the servant would serve his master forever. And that might only be until the next Jubilee, or, certainly until he died.

So "forever" in the Bible is limited. And the only way you can make "forever" long enough for eternal life, is to say, "We will live forever and ever; and there will be no more death." That's the only way you make life long enough. And so you can point to many things in Scripture.

Then, of course, there are other very interesting ways one could approach this. If the penalty for sin is described in the Third Angel's Message as being "eternal torture in sulfurous flames," and Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin; He should still be writhing in the sulfurous flames, should He not? Or else we're not paid up. Number one, He never went into sulfurous flames; and number two, He arose and went to Heaven on Sunday. And we have bad news, friends; we are not paid up.

And when He arrived in Heaven and appeared before the angels and said, "Is it enough?" they responded as in the book of Revelation, "Yes." You know, they praised Him for His revelation, His holiness, His rightness, that He'd met all the problems. They've been praising Him ever since. In the legal view, they should have said, "No, You get right back down. You're supposed to be paying the penalty for sin, which is to be eternally tortured in sulfurous flames." They never said that. He'd answered all the questions. If we want to know how the wicked will die, we need to go to the cross.

And I may have mentioned this before; but there's a remarkable book put out not too long ago, called The Fire That Consumes, by a Dr. Fudge. And he is an Evangelical himself. In fact, this might be the best for this particular friend who is an Evangelical. Dr. Fudge is an Evangelical himself. And he says, "I always believed in the eternally burning fires of Hell, because the soul was immortal," and so on. He said, "I realize I had never gone through the Bible thoroughly myself to find out if it was true."

So he took the time. He went all the way through; and then he wrote a sizeable book, The Fire That Consumes, in which he says, "There's nothing in the Bible that suggests the soul is immortal, or that the wicked will be tortured in eternal fire forever. It simply isn't there." He even discusses where it came from, which is rather interesting to observe. And then he says, "If you want to know how the wicked die, is it not true that Jesus died the death of the wicked?" Was He not made to be sin, though He knew no sin? He said, "I suggest we go to the cross." Beautiful.

And what Evangelical can say, "I don't want to go to the cross"?

So even though we hold different views, we should all arrive at the cross. I think that's the only thing we all agree on. You know, Protestants, Catholics alike; you know, the cross is everything to Christians of all persuasions. But that does suggest that we think about the cross, and we go back to it frequently in our thoughts and in our reading: How did Jesus die? How was the Father involved? Hear Jesus cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And then hear that in the light of all the rest of Scripture.

And so maybe that would be a winsome way to do it. One has to find the winsome way, or it just won't work.

As Dr. Winneger used to tell us up at PUCComment: "You cannot antagonize and persuade at the same time." So if you approach it in such a way you set up somebody's barrier, you might make a beautiful presentation, but they haven't heard a word. They've been preparing a countering speech, you see. And one doesn't want to do that. But how can two people fight at the foot of the cross? You know, it's a most disarming way to go.

So really, there's not one way for everybody. One needs to know the person one is talking to. If this is a devout Evangelical to whom the death of Christ means everything, one could perhaps start there. Would you a further question about this, anybody? Admittedly, the way the words read, "If you sin, you're going to go to Hell, and you're going to suffer in sulfurous flames for eternity, and you will have no rest day or night." Could it be made any plainer than that?

And yet in the light of the rest of Scripture, we are very Biblical when we interpret those terms as the Bible understands those terms. Even the fire; no ordinary fire. The glory of God, the life-giving glory of God, has the appearance of fire. That's mentioned repeatedly in Scripture. And I believe this is God simply unveiling His life-giving glory. His strange act is for the very first time, He no longer protects us from the awful consequence. But how sad He is when He does it. He lets us go and gives us up. And He wouldn't do it if there were any hope. It's because we're bent on leaving Him, that He lets us go. And then it's consistent all the way through.

When we talk the last one, at peace with our Heavenly Father, the time when that will really be tested, is when we watch what's described in the Third Angel's Message; and we watch rebels being consumed. And if that awful sight should make us afraid of God, then He's lost. Are we prepared to watch the wicked die in the fire, and not become afraid of God?

So this is really what He has to wait for, until we're clear on the death of the wicked; the destruction of the wicked. We have to be clear on that. Because if that awful scene at the end leads us to serve Him from fear, then the seeds of rebellion are still in His universe; and He let the end come too soon.

So He really waits for us to grow up in this thing. Now, some have died afraid of God; not clear on this. Like the thief on the cross. This would suggest that during the millennium, there might still be several things to learn. Yes, we trust God; but still more to learn. But those who have lived through the Seven Last Plagues, lest they relish them and say, "Ooh, isn't it good to see our enemies suffer like this? I mean, I'm not being malicious; but my sanctified sense of justice is being deeply satisfied."

I'm very suspicious of that kind of thing. If that's the way we feel then it's come too soon. It's come too soon. We think, "We do indeed have a vengeful God; but fortunately, He's on our side and against those others." We should find no relish for that thing in the end; no satisfaction of any kind whatever. God will not be pleased.

So truly we have to understand the death of the wicked. And that's the cross, isn't it? He died the death of a sinner.

Venden: It's after that picture in the book of Revelation where are those words, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Perhaps that has even more meaning, than just we won't cry anymore, in relationship to the heartbreak of that final scene.

Maxwell: Yes. Oh, don't you see it that way? Yes, I do.

Venden: This gentleman here had a question.

Comment: You said that eternity does not mean eternity as in the sense of long duration of time, unless it's followed with, "And there shall be no more death." Well, what about this one that says, "They shall be tormented with fire and brimstone forever and ever and ever; and they have no rest night or day." What does it mean by, "they have not rest night or day"?

Maxwell: Yes. How long will this be?

Comment: Does that mean they don't exist, or what?

Maxwell: No. And we have the hint, you know, that some suffer more than others. That those who have been more rebellious; more stripes, more punishment. And that's given people pause, you know. What does that mean?

Now, if I can refer to Ellen White in this connection; because she's meant so much to many of us: She very candidly, while supporting the most gracious picture of God conceivable - she absolutely adopted the testimony of Jesus as true about the Father. She says, "It is apparent from Scripture, that when the life-giving glory of God is unveiled, and the wicked and all that is out of harmony with God are consumed, some live longer in that life-giving glory.

Now, what causes that? Now, if it's God doing it, that's torture. Because it's not discipline. They learn nothing; they die in the end. That simply means that God has found the most painful way to put His enemies to death; and He will extend it as long as they deserve. How would you feel about such a God?

So we have to look for other possible meanings. One really has to go through the Bible, and look up all the references to this glory of God that looks like fire. And we realize we've never seen it. I've never seen this life-giving glory. Satan lived in it. And in the end, when God unveils His life-giving glory, and Satan once again lives in it, he lives longer than others in that awful fire at the end.

I would understand that if God were putting His children to sleep in the end, He'd practice euthanasia. He'd put them to sleep as quick as He could; as painlessly as He could. In fact, He wouldn't even resurrect them; just let them be asleep. But because of the issues in the great controversy, and because God wants it plain [that] He's not taking away our eternal life. He simply leaves us to reap the natural consequences. So I'd want to go through the Bible and ask about natural consequence.

Moses says, "God, let me see You in Your glory." And God says, "No man can see Me in My glory and live." And in the legal view, that would be, "If I catch you peeking, I'll kill you." Like, "If I catch you taking fruit off that tree, I'll kill you." No; it's that man, now out of harmony with God, cannot live in that life-giving glory. This glory in the presence of which even mighty angels veil their faces. We cannot see it.

Now, Moses begged God. And God said, "All right; I'll put you in a cleft in the rock, and I'll put My hand over you; and I'll let you see My back." King James, "My hinderparts." Which intrigued me as a boy; and I read on to learn what God's hinder parts looked like. You know, how a boy might. And there was nothing there about it at all. It was all about the kind of Person He is; it was almost a disappointment at the time.

But when Moses came down the mountain; and not having seen God's face, but having been close to God; he didn't know it, but his face shone so brightly they couldn't look at him. It was so bright, and he wore a veil out of consideration for the people.

So this glory is not just His glorious character. It's that; but it's more. It is real, physical glory and power that surrounds the Person of God. And it tempts one - since I'm a layman and I don't know much about nuclear physics - to even speculate, how God could take just some of this enormous, infinite power that He has, and speak, and create matter, and hang the whole vast universe in space. You know, nothing for Him to do, to take the energy and lock it up in the atom.

God is infinite power, you know. And this glory that surrounds His Person is incredible. And Adam and Eve could walk in it. It energized them. They had no need to be afraid. But then when Adam and Eve sinned, God veiled His life-giving glory, lest they be consumed. And He's veiled it ever since. Until when all is over, we've been healed and restored, He will unveil His life-giving glory.

He wants His children to live in the light, you know; not in the dark. This earth is a dark place. That may be why so many things have changed on this earth through the years; and why geophysicists are finding all kinds of things in the earth that are hard to explain, except on the basis of amazing radioactive changes and what have you. I don't know what I'm talking about. Except when I hear them talking about it, I think, "I could fit that into my model very nicely. It's no problem."

The biggest change that occurred to our planet, may not have been the Flood, but when God

veiled His life-giving glory and mercy, and this earth became a dark place. Think what that's done to our planet. Someday, this earth will be a light place again. And even angels cannot appear in their glory, can they? Christ veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity, that human beings might come to know God without being destroyed or consumed.

God cannot walk this earth as He is, and talk to us face to face. But He will in the hereafter. And we'll see Him without the darkening veil between. Because then it will be safe. God will not unveil His life-giving glory until His children have been forgiven? No, until they've been healed. That's what has to be done.

But there will be some who have not trusted Him enough, to be willing to listen. And He's not been able to heal them. And He sadly says, "There's nothing more I can do; but I'm not going to leave this earth a dark place." And He comes next time in His unveiled glory. And all that is out of harmony will be consumed. But hopefully you and I are in the City. We've been there for a thousand years, and it hasn't hurt us a bit. There's nothing destructive about that life-giving glory. It's only if you're out of harmony; and that's one's own choice.

So I would have to fit into that, this picture. And the Third Angel's Message may hint of that. Or, it may be just like Isaiah speaks of the garbage dump out there. You remember? "Their worm shall not die. The fire shall not be quenched." And it looks like an ever burning Hell outside the walls of Jerusalem. It's just to suggest that the consuming of the garbage is complete and eternal. And maybe there are picturesque ways of thinking the smoke goes up forever and ever. A number of verses in the Bible that speak of that. The fire has gone out, but the smoke ascends.

There is even another way to look at the eternal fire, too. If that eternal fire, that everlasting fire, is the life-giving glory of God; then I hope it never does go out. Because we're going to live in it. And that might be one of the nicest ways out of this situation. Yes, the fire is eternal, because the fire is the everlasting, life-giving glory of God which will never go out. But we can live in it.

So there are various ways of approaching it, that do not in any way compromise Jesus' picture of His Father, [or that give the impression] that He's a fearsome Deity who says, "You either love Me, or I'll torture you in sulfurous flames for eternity."

Now, what is amazing, is that some of our so devout Evangelical friends - you know, real candidates for the Kingdom - are still somehow able to live with this. That if they don't accept the death of Christ in their behalf for their ingratitude and lack of faith, they will be confined to eternal torture forever. And that's why some of them like Dr. Fudge have said, "I've got to go back and take another look." And when he looked, lo and behold, it wasn't there.

And I felt Luther went back and forth between the two, you know. With his preoccupation with Scripture, and the truth; he found it very difficult to accept this. Sometimes he writes as if he believed in the immortality of the soul and eternal burning. Other times, he seems to draw away.

I have the feeling Billy Graham doesn't like it a bit. "But it's there," he says. "I have to accept it, because there it is. Someday we'll understand." Well, I think we can understand more than dear Billy does. I mean, think of all that he has done. But if he could be relieved in his theology of Hell, this ever-burning Hell, he could preach with even more potency, I think, about God.

Comment: It says here that, "If anyone worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in the hand, he will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out full

strength because of His wrath. He will be tormented"— and this is what I wanted to ask— "With burning sulphur, and in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb." This says nothing about saints. It doesn't say anything here that . . .

Maxwell: Are you disappointed?

Comment: No! No! I'm not!

Maxwell: I mean, that you won't get an invitation to watch the fireworks, maybe?

Comment: No, what I'm trying. . . No, wait a minute! What I'm trying to say here, is that maybe this is before this Third Angel's Message, is this turmoil and this friction, and so forth, that is just before or about the time that Christ comes. Could that be this "holy angels, and the Lamb," and so forth; all of this tremendous torment that they'll be going through?

Maxwell: I hadn't thought of that distinction, but. . .

Comment: And sulphur. What does that mean? Is that an anesthetic?

Maxwell: On the contrary. No.

Comment: I know Elder Spear used to mention that. You know, he said that God and His -- that's the way he explained it.

Maxwell: Well, not an anesthetic. He will really purify things by consuming them, that's for sure. But I think that the severity of the language is what really distresses people the most. And we can raise the question: Did God speak too severely? But we've asked that question many times before. How about on Sinai? And that was a fearsome demonstrations.

Now, if God overdid it, He might so terrify people, that He would deprive them of their freedom to say "yes" or "no." Would you say that after the terrifying manifestation of God's majesty on Sinai, the people were so overwhelmed they didn't dare disagree with Him? What were they doing as soon as the thunder died away? Dancing around the golden calf.

Or when He ordered the stoning of Achan. That was a fearsome thing to do. Were they so afraid of God, they obeyed Him mechanically from then on? Look what they were doing almost immediately. After the she-bears, a brief moment of respect; and then they were right back to what they were doing before.

So let's ask of the Third Angel's Message: Is it so severe, it really has terrorized the human race, and they all obeying everywhere? And all we need to do is go and tell them, "It's wonderful you're obeying; but you're obeying for the wrong reason." You stop the average person on the sidewalk, and ask if he's heard of the Third Angel's Message. This is God's loudest thunder in the whole Bible, and they haven't even heard it. So of course, it's very, very severe, to try to get some attention. And it still hardly touches people.

Unfortunately, some will take it - I heard one the other day on television. And he made it even worse. I've never heard anything so severe as he described what it will be like, year after year, down there in those sulphurous flames. "Why," he said, "a million years into eternity, you'll be praying God to let you die. But He won't let you die; for there is no death down there. You deserve to suffer." Oh, he went on! And he was a large man, with a big voice, on television, Oh,

it was a fearsome picture of God! Then his voice got all soft, and he said, "Now I give you my appeal." You know. "Do you want to serve the Lord?" Well, I couldn't hear because of all that thunder before. So he really misunderstood it.

The pastor said it in his prayer. You know, every time God talks like this, there are tears in His voice. He doesn't like to talk to His children like this. We know it, on the authority of the previous Sixty-five books. You know He hates to talk like this. But He's willing to run the risk of being misunderstood, in order to get our attention.

So I'm glad we have scores of examples of this before we get to the Third Angel's Message. Don't start with the Third Angel's Message; finish with it. Although, if you needed it to get somebody to take the message seriously, maybe there is a time to start with this, and he'll say, quaking like the jailer in Philippi: "Well then, what must I do to be saved?" And you say, "I have great Good News which will relieve your shuddering." And then you go on to give him the Good News. But in the normal course of events, one ought to start with the First Angel; then the Second Angel; then the Third Angel.

Can you see, though, there's really no one way to approach everybody? It all depends. If people are hard of hearing, the Third Angel's Message, thunder, she-bears, whatever's necessary. But if you're dealing with some gentle soul, you could scare them to death with the Third Angel's Message.

My wife was mentioning at breakfast this morning, as student in the eighth grade at Lodi - because she started in the eighth grade in the dormitory there - she remember when she was first asked -- she was not an Adventist yet -- to memorize the Three Angels' Messages. And she said she was scared spitless when she had read these three! Just absolutely scared of God. And then she thought the faculty represented God; and she was scared of them.

She did say something I've got to tell you, though. She said there was one face there that just was such a relief to everybody. It was Elder Paul Heubach, who was on the faculty at the time. I've heard lots of people say that: What a comfort he's been to many, many people. And he has not wavered in his picture of God for - how many years is that? This was 1936. See, my wife had the privilege of being his reader and secretary those years. So Elder Heubach and my wife met forty-eight years ago. And she's admired him ever since, for his picture of God. And you can see what it's done for him. It works that way, you see.

So what a relief he was. She memorized the Three Angels' Messages. And then her eyes fell on Elder Heubach; and she was encouraged. We ought to do that for each other, don't you think? He's done it for a lot of people.

Venden: That's beautiful. I think we have a question right here.

Comment: I have two small things. In the final chapter of the Great Controversy— the book, Mrs. White speaks in such wonderful language, and, you know, so moving and clear, and careful. And yet, going back to what we're talking about, she distinctly uses the word "punishment" twice in the paragraph on Satan walking in the flames.

Maxwell: Yes.

Comment: How do you understand the word "punishment"?

Maxwell: I would have to go through her writings and note all the other places where she uses the language that belongs to the more legal model. You know how much she does that. But she also has the other model, the larger one, in which she fits the smaller one. And she seems to go back and forth between the language that belongs to both. And assuming - and we have every reason to - that she was a person of very balanced mind and intelligence, she knew what she was doing.

So in communicating with others, she sometimes would use this other language. Like, she would more often use the word "justify" than "set right." But oh, what an oasis it is in her writings, to come across a place where she says, "The only way in which God can set men right and keep men right, is to reveal the truth about His character." It's just as in the Bible, much of the time the language is more the language of the emergency measures.

Well, like, numerically, now; how many references are there to the necessity for priestly mediation between man and God? Many, aren't there? How many places are there in the Bible where Jesus says, "There is no need for Me to plead with the Father, because the Father loves you Himself?" One. All right, and I have friends who tell me in letters and over the phone, and in other ways - sometimes very, very earnestly - that since the Bible has that other language most of the time, I mean, "why don't you put that one above the others? And I say, "Well, Jesus said, 'Now I'm talking plainly and clearly.'" He made it number one.

Besides, if you take all those others, you can't explain the number one. But if you take that number one statement, you can understand all the others. We were so scared of God, that God gave us Someone in between. He came to be in between. And it all fits together. As we so often mention - I hope not too often - the beauty of the larger great controversy view, is you can fit everything in there, without bending it and twisting it.

Isn't it understandable, that when we're still scared of God, and say, "Don't let God speak to us, lest we die," that He, the gracious One who meets us in so many other ways, would then give us Someone in between. He doesn't even tell us who He is at first. And by and by, we find out the One between is God. And there never really was anybody in between. We learn that as we grow up together.

And the problem is, this growing up business. That's why I entitled the one coming up, God Waits for His Children to Grow Up. Of course, the word for being grown up is "maturity" or "perfection." And we've even taken perfection and put it out of sight. And made it an unattainable goal, rather than the natural thing to do. You know, it's unnatural not to grow up. The natural thing would be, with all the advantages that we have, to grow up in our understanding of these things. And maybe even share with Job and Paul this conviction. So that when Satan comes a Christ; masquerading as an angel of light; we will be able to say, "Though an angel from Heaven give a different view, he's wrong; and I will not believe it."

So Ellen White talks to various audiences. You know, sometimes she's quite elementary here. So punishment - she uses that word to stress that some live longer in the fire. But the thought that God would be torturing them because they deserve it, and they have it coming -- she'd recoil from that in horror!

You've worked on this. How do you explain her use of the -- ? It's in the Bible, too, isn't it? All the way through. Even here in John. John, who says, "They will be tormented day and night," is the beloved apostle who wrote all about love in the Gospel and the three Epistles. And he's the one who says, "There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear. Now, if you'll turn over the

page, I'll give you the Third Angel's Message."

He wrote them both. So there must be an underlying consistency for us to look for. What do you do, though, yourself?

Comment: I have to catch myself, you know, to get myself back on track. Because it's so easy to go back to the old way of thinking.

Maxwell: Maybe another illustration comes to mind. We might say, "Now, lung cancer is the penalty for smoking." We might say that. And then we realize that that implies that it's not the natural consequence. If someone in authority says, "You smoke too much; I will penalize you with lung cancer." And you know that isn't the case. And so you drop the word "penalty" and substitute "consequence."

But we use these words loosely. And I think often she's using the word "punishment" when she really means more, "inevitable consequence." But these words overlap a lot, as all words do. So the only way to discover her real meaning, is to get all the places where she mentions this.

A real illustration: She adopts with enthusiasm, "There is no need for anyone to die to reconcile the Father to us." And yet she will use the word "propitiation," which means assuaging the Father's wrath, "expiation," paying the penalty for sin. Many other words like this that belong strictly to a rather legal view. She uses them all.

And so the only way I can be fair to her, is to take all that she has written, and see what's behind it. And she doesn't vacillate between the views. Because some of her best insights were very early in her life. Like the one on the road to Emmaus; where she said, "The reason why Christ didn't reveal who He was, is that He didn't want them to agree with Him because of His personal testimony, His authority. He led them through the Scriptures. And not until they had come to an intelligent, confidence based on unquestionable evidence, did He reveal who He was."

You say, "That must have come later in her life. That's a mature comment." That's in the 1870's. So she had early on, so marvelous insights into these things; which I find very much in harmony with Scripture. So granting her the assumption of knowing what she was doing - just as with the Bible writers - then I better take all she's said on this subject.

And it's helping to have the computers now; all these laser discs. You know, you can punch up "punishment" on these laser discs over here in the Heritage Room. I eventually get a page or two of references, where she talks about punishment. Look them all up, and compare them together. At least, as a procedure, I'd want to go that way,

Venden: We have a question here.

Comment: I was just going to ask what way we're using punishment; you know, we're seeing now in child development, that punishment is allowing a child to get the natural consequences.

Maxwell: Yes.

Comment: And. . .

Maxwell: I think you might use the term. But then you'd explain it elsewhere, and on some other occasion.

Comment: We don't like using it anymore because it has a bad connotation, but originally that's what it meant.

Maxwell: Like penalty now. I'm veering away from it, because of what it implies. And I'd rather use "natural result," "inevitable consequence," something like that. And she uses those words very frequently too. And they cannot be taken to contradict each other, or she was not the balanced person she obviously shows herself to be. And the Scriptures have exactly the same problem.

Venden: Right here.

Comment: Doesn't the word "penalty" usually mean though, that you've plan for a person to recover from it and go on corrected? Where the word "torture" is more like, "This is it. You know, we're just doing this to finish you off." At least, when I think of punishment, you know, a parent punishing the child, or whatever, it's like, "I don't want you to do it again." And I don't like the word "punishment" being used as God destroying the wicked. Because it's like, "I want you to learn this; and that's it. OK. No more."

Maxwell: Well, this is a very good illustration to add. Because, "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, chastises." And what does it mean to be chastised? We say, "Well, it means to be punished." Whom the Lord loves, He punishes. Well, there's part of the word that's right, but a lot of it that isn't. The Greek word behind this, is "Paideuo", which means "to treat and instruct as a child." And so it would be much better to say, "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines." It's really about the best word. Now, discipline doesn't mean punish; discipline means to instruct. However, in the course of instruction, you might have to have recourse to various and sundry methods; some of which might be more vigorous than others -- whatever you think is appropriate.

It's a very broad word. "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines." But not, "Whom the Lord loves, He destroys." So if punishment suggests destruction, then you can't use it there. If penalty is final, you can't say, "Those whom the Lord loves, upon them He imposes a penalty."

Of course, penalty sometimes is temporary. That's why you have to use many words. And better than words, you'd better use many illustrations. And I think that's why the Bible is not given to us as a systematic theology of many complicated words. It's rather, one story after another, after another. I think the story approach is the most dependable theological approach. It is the Biblical approach, by the way.

Which I think I've mentioned to you I said to my father; when some would say, "I wish your books were a little heavier with theology," you know. And I told him, "I think that's the Biblical approach." You tell stories. Isn't it? Most of the Bible is history, interspersed with some theological meditation and explanation. But the great bulk of it is history. Because in the history, God is involved; and He's revealing Himself, demonstrating Himself to us. And the beauty of a picture is, it can be translated into two thousand languages. And it's still the same event; it's the same picture. If we were tied to certain rigid words; if "justification" is the only way to explain what it means to be restored to a right relationship with God, then we'd have trouble in other languages.

Mr. Dr. Nida, the chairman - the secretary for versions for the American Bible Society, has written articles and books to show that some cultures have no words for these things.

"I will make you fishers of men," I just read in the Wycliffe magazine that comes out. You know this notice from these marvelous Wycliffe people - -

Venden: Who have written it in other words.

Maxwell: In other words. I think the last one says, "I appoint you to be fishers of men." And when they came to that, to fish meant to kill. Because when they fished for fish, they killed them.

So Christ said, "I send you all out to be killers of men." Well, they had to change it. No longer fishers; you've got to draw different pictures for it. You can't even refer to Peter being a fisherman. You've got to do this whole thing over in another way, to get the main point; to win people.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock." How could there be anything wrong with that? Except that in some cultures, only thieves knock. You see, a friend announces his name. And so in some versions, "Behold, I stand at the door and call."

And what do they know up at the North Pole, about lambs? They did know about baby seals. Would one of those little white cuddly ones do, maybe? The ones they hit with the baseball bats.

You know. The thing is, it's the meaning that counts, not the symbol. So always we want to learn the meaning. And that's why to learn of events, and records of things actually happening, is the Biblical way. And you can describe it in all kinds of language. Even baby talk to the children; and most sophisticated language for those who need something more suitable. That's where the versatility of the Bible lies. You know, the fact that so much of it is a record of events.

Comment: I want to ask: How do you understand all our fellow Christian believers— how they can reconcile "the wages of sin is death," with living forever in turmoil and torment? You know, it said very clearly, You'll die because of sin. And yet they want us to keep on living in turmoil.

Maxwell: Well, I thought of this when this large brother was preaching on television when he said, "A million years in Hell, you'll wish you could die; but there is no death there." And I think he maybe had forgotten some other verses there.

It's the one who is often pictured as presiding over that dreadful place, who said, "There is no death." Isn't that true? It was the devil who said, "There is no death; the soul is immortal." I would rather though; I would rather think of how Christian are some of the people I know who believe in the immortality of the soul.

Comment: How do they reconcile that. . . ?

Maxwell: Well, I'll give you an illustration. I don't think I've mentioned this before. But one of the finest men I have ever met, was Dr. Robert V. Moss. He and his very gracious Southern wife were neighbors in our bug-ridden, cockroach-infested apartment in Chicago. But it was worth it, to be next door with them, and share our miserable little bathroom between these two apartments. We had many, many conversations together. He was getting his Ph.D. in New Testament, same as I was. He went on to become dean of his denomination's seminary, and the president of his church, and one of the officers of the World Council of Churches. Oh, he was outstanding! Just marvelous!

Well, we agreed that as the years went by, we might learn something that would change our theological views, we might compare notes. So one day he came west to the Association of Theological Seminaries for a meeting in the Bay area. And I drove to get him. And on the way back, I asked him, "You know any new theological ideas?" "Well," he said, "I've just written a book on Paul. And I'll have to admit to you, there is nothing in Paul that supports the immortality of the soul. I'll admit it. But," he says, "I still have to believe it. Because," he said, "the soul is of such great worth. There must be something for it after this."

And we say, "That's right; but it's the idea of soul sleep." You know. And I didn't see him the next few years. And then he died way too soon - marvelous man that he was - of cancer. It was a great loss. He was just extraordinary. If I find I am assigned next door to him in the Kingdom, I would be absolutely delighted. And I hope his wife's with him. She was just as nice. They were wonderful people.

When we left he said, "Well, you go home a Seventh-day Adventist; and I'm going home a first-day realized Eschatologist." That's the way he said it, you know. But my, if he should arrive in the Kingdom and look around, "Oh," he'd say. "I'm sure glad I was wrong about some of this. This is marvelous! This is just what I want."

And I think that's why a sincere, humble willingness to listen is the number one requirement for salvation. And he seemed to be that way all the time. But he grew up in a different environment, under different influences; very loyal to his church. I don't know how he finally resolved it. But you know, I'm sure we all are wrong on a few points. But his picture of God was very winsome; though how he fit in some things, I never did quite find out.

He knew Adventism so well, by the way, that one day at a group of Evangelicals, he ventured to describe Adventism to his friends - without telling his wife. And he did such a beautiful job, she got all worried; she thought she'd lost her husband. You know. So afterwards she asked him. "Well," he said, "would you want me to do a bad job at representing the Adventists?" He did that good a job. Oh, I'd be happy to be represented by the kind of man he was. Robert V. Moss. Wonderful gentleman.

So you see, there are some higher qualities that are of greater importance. And in the hereafter, I think he's the kind of man who would love to see that some of the things we stand for are really true after all.

Comment: How do the other denominations handle the word "perish" in John 3:16?

Maxwell: "Shall not perish?" Well, this ties in with the question you raised. Some of them regard Hell, though the soul is immortal, as the equivalent of death. It's worse than death. So they will say they do not accept what the devil said in the Garden of Eden. "You will die, but the way you die is to go to Hell where you wish you could die, but can't. It's worse than death." So most of them will say, "Hell is the death of which we were warned." Most that I know of. You've worked with that. Well, you're at Princeton now. How did you handle that?

Venden: Well, that subject didn't come up with any great clarity in discussions, though I think that's generally the response I've gotten.

Maxwell: It's the general equivalent of the death that is the result of sin.

Venden: All right. We had a hand over here.

Maxwell: By the way; and if you ask them, "How can you worship a God who would do such a thing?" They say, "Wait a minute. His thoughts are higher than my thoughts. His justice— we have no conception of His kind of justice. Besides, who are we to question God's inscrutable ways? I just bow my head and accept it." That's having to accept something that seems so contrary. That's really living with a skeleton in your closet. And we have the opportunity, I think, of offering one solution that is very Biblical.

Venden: So many of— when you talk about Evangelicals, even among that group, there are those who preach of eternally burning fire with all-time vigor.

Maxwell: Yes.

Venden: But, for instance, at Princeton, so many of them would not really accept that— believe that way. But neither would they accept a literal Heaven in the way that we would feel the Bible teaches it.

Maxwell: Yes. Some come this close as to say: "God will give them up. They cannot be taken to Heaven. They would not be safe to have there. Therefore they will go somewhere else. Well, anywhere other than Heaven is a place of deprivation; and you will sense your separation from God, and your eternal loss.

Yes, I've noticed many Evangelical preachers cannot stomach the idea of God eternally torturing. But they are stuck with the immortality of the soul. And you see, if that's a given, "The soul is immortal," it either goes to the place of bliss, or it has to go somewhere else, because it's immortal.

And so the position you take on the nature of man is that fundamental to your whole understanding of the Plan of Salvation. It isn't just some minor thing; it isn't just the state of the dead, alone. If the soul is immortal, it either spends eternity in Heaven, or it spends it somewhere else, and it will forever sense its loss.

Now, that's Hell to many. The kindest preachers of the doctrine of Hell will say that. And there are many, aren't there, that do that. Because they can't imagine God purposely torturing. It's just that God is stuck with immortal souls that He can't admit to the Kingdom; so they have to go somewhere else. And they'll be aware of this forever and ever. And there will be no death.

That's odd, isn't it? I think we're more straightforward with the words.

Venden: Let's close with this last one here.

Maxwell: It's that late!

Comment: I was wondering how when you find yourself at a stand-off with somebody like this? And you've been discussing this; and you get to a place where it seems like they can't hear. Or they just want to say, "Well, how can we understand God?" You know, how do you graciously get out of it? How do you back off?

Maxwell: That varies very much with the person. I mean, it's becoming somewhat pugilistic, you know, you should have backed off sooner. [Laughter] What's so wonderful, though, is to be with some of these very knowledgeable scholarly people; and they are so Christian about it.

Now I had— because I grew up in England, I didn't have the privilege of going to Adventist schools. I went to some marvelous public schools—the Watford Boy's Grammar School—and I had realized there are lots of other people who are very kind people, you know. So that was good to learn that early in life.

At the University of Chicago Divinity School I met such fine people, distinguished people, Christian people; coming from where they are. And the Lord knows how sincere they are. They surely seemed sincere to me. And so when we would disagree over things, it was always in a very stimulating way. And if I realized I hadn't made my case persuasively, I went home to see if I couldn't learn a better way to do it.

But I never went home with my tail between my legs - ever! Not once. I mean, they would feel they had been most un-Christian if they made you feel that way. And that's very wonderful, to be among people who are knowledgeable enough to hold opinions, and yet be very, very gracious about it. And sometimes opinions were quite opposite. But to them it would be a sin to be impolite and rude, particularly in matters of religion. That was a good lesson to learn. I bet you found that a Princeton, didn't you?

Venden: Yes, that's true; of course, she's thinking about some that may not be at that point.

Maxwell: Well, yes. I mean, it might be in Sabbath School class. You know. And what shall we do there?

Comment: I had one of them say to me, "Well, if you can cross out two words in the New Testament, you know, "forever and ever" in the Third Angel's Message, then I can cross out anything else I want to in the Bible, too. And pretty soon the whole Bible doesn't mean a thing.

Maxwell: You have a long way to go before you can really talk to that person. However, often that's a desperate comment. They're not really that unbelieving. And I find it to be helpful to point to certain other places, and say, "Well, what do you with that? and what do you do with this?"

Deuteronomy 14 is often very helpful. And ask, "Are you, this next weekend, going to take the tithe and buy strong drink with it, and rejoice before the Lord? And I see you are married. Did you disobey the Bible in doing that? Or are you willing to settle for being a second class saint. And so on. You point to those passages.

Comment: [She made a comment, not picked up on the tape, which drew laughter.]

Maxwell: To take the tithe....Well, you are now beginning to identify the nature of the one you're talking to. You do have a long way to go. That's true; you see. And one has to find out where the other person is. I think often with some people, we make--I hate to put "up" and "down" on this, but you may start way over here, and this person's way over here. It's a real waste of time.

One has to find some common ground together. And the University of Chicago was a great exercise in this. Because though it was the best place for Biblical studies I could find in the world, and I had the opportunity of going anywhere I wanted, nevertheless, there were not many people there who accepted the Bible the way we do, or believed in God. It's just they were so very good on the tools of Biblical research.

And often the question arose in my mind: How could they know the Bible so well and not believe in God? I've often wondered about that. Very great Biblical scholars; and yet not share our view. And then I realized; you know, you could know all the details and still not know God. So in many ways I was prompted by being there, to try to take the look at the Bible God would like us to take, and to be really open to correction as need be. And that's where I found that if you take the Bible as a whole, it holds up magnificently. Even under those folks' most probing questions.

We do have, taking the Bible as we do, the most defensible, the most consistent, the most coherent, the most intellectually respectable system of thought, among all the philosophies there are. We're not left saying, where [do] we come from, and why we're here, and where do we go after we die? And is there a God? And if so, what does He want of us? What does He like? The most important questions a thinking person can raise. We have answers to that that all fit together, and it really makes sense out of life.

I was very proud of the Biblical picture of God, and the meaning of life, in that investigating environment. And yet I never felt threatened by anybody; they were so gentlemanly about it, though they didn't have our view of God. So I've wondered: Why couldn't I be more persuasive? What about these educated people in the world? What about this General Conference committee to try to communicate with such people? We've got to find better ways of making sense. Because they're not where the average person on the street is. And you tell them something sensational; you've turned them off right now. You send out some advertising with flames and horns and tails on it. They wouldn't cross the street to go to it.

Is there some other way to talk to people like Nicodemus? They like it straight, as Nicodemus did. We still have something to do for that kind of person. But then, who among us can talk to those folk? If I might say so, that's one of the things Jack Provonsha does so beautifully. He can talk to these people, and they respect him. And then they learn he's a good physician, too. I mean, I hope he lives forever. His influence is superb. He has the things— don't you feel so, Lou? And we have others among us who have these particular abilities, who can talk to these people. We can't all talk to everybody. Only the Lord has been able to do that.

Venden: Sometimes the challenge to talk to the man of the street, is just as great. . .

Maxwell: Oh, that's true too!

Venden: . . . to try to communicate in a significant way that gets through.

Maxwell: Yes. You meet the man on the street and say, "I would like to discuss the existential immediacy of the present situation." And you know, nothing's going to happen at all! So to communicate with versatility is the ultimate goal.

Venden: I like what you said about the story thing. H. Grady Davis [?] in the book that has been the landmark for teaching and preaching for a number of years, points out that the vast percentage of the Bible is story; and just a bit on the expository kind of thing. And our preaching patterns are just the opposite. We spend a lot of time— and spend so little time with story. It's a very good observation.

Maxwell: Well said.

Venden: I think we better close off here. Would you lead us in prayer?

Maxwell: Our loving Father in Heaven, our discussion reminds us of the fact that Thou art infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely intelligent. And how little do we know, how small we are, how briefly we have lived. And yet Thou dost welcome our prayers, our requests, our cries. And even though we do not know how to pray as we should, Thy gracious Spirit, God Himself, is here to help us.

And so though we might seem sophisticated to each other, we know that in Thy sight, this is all so simple. Our understanding is so elementary.

And yet the message seems to come through in Scripture, that briefly as we live and little as we know, there is enough evidence, and it adds up together so convincingly, that we may actually arrive at the place where we could say with Paul, "If an angel from Heaven, brilliant as he is, should come with a different version of the Good News, a different picture of Thee, we would be able to perceive the error, to see where he is wrong, and to stand for the truth and say, 'We will not believe what we are hearing; it is wrong.'"

It seems marvelous that we could know Thee, the infinite One, enough to be able to stake our lives on something that sure and that certain. And yet we see Paul doing it, and yet not being belligerent. (He was once until he knew this truth.) A man who was so convinced, and so strong in his certainty, and yet so very gracious to people, so willing to allow them a great deal of latitude. And yet when it came to this truth about Thee, how adamantly he took his position. He did not ask us to be like him. He did say to imitate him as he imitated Christ. Surely Christ, the gentle One, was utterly convinced about the truth; and has made it possible for us to be convinced the same.

We know we face difficult days to come. Days when chances will come to present Thee truly to inquirers; the man on the street and the man in the university. When those opportunities come, may we speak well and truly of Thee. But then on the other hand, we know that enemies will arise with great skill to confuse and twist the message, and obscure the evidence, maybe even work on us personally to make us afraid to speak, and afraid to hold to these things we know to be true.

We know that even the adversary, powerful as he is, is coming to confuse, coming even as Christ. And he will not hesitate to use force and deception. So surely we need to be settled into the truth not only for our own sakes, and to be able to present Thee to other people, but to survive what's coming, and not be confused.

So surely we have every reason [during] these precious days of freedom to investigate, to weigh the evidence, to check it with each other. For we're all so fallible. We need each other's correction and investigation, that together we may share the unity that is inherent in trusting Thee and knowing the same Christ.

Help us to be such people, that perhaps we could be the ones to give what we've called the Loud Cry of this Third Angel's Message, to say what needs to be said about Thee, and to demonstrate it more clearly than a group of us weak humans has ever done it before. It would be an honor to be in this group. May we covet that honor, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, #16

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

"God's Last Pleading With His Children"

Venden: I was looking at the title for the evening, "God's Last Pleading With His Children," and as I looked down at those messages in Revelation 14, particularly the second and the third, I wonder if the title tonight might have been more appropriately, "God's Last Threatening." Isn't that what's happening here?

AGM: Well, it certainly is a warning. It's just that it's so serious. If we were more willing to listen, He wouldn't have to talk like this. Remember we just had the words of Hosea 14, "Come home, come home," but we're not listening. This is the God who sent she-bears and thundered on Sinai because He doesn't want to lose His children. I forget whether we used this illustration before, but if a father were walking in the mountains on a trail with his son, and his son got perilously near the precipice, to save his son, the father might first talk softly, "Son stop where you are." But the wind is blowing and the son doesn't hear. The father raises his voice, "Son, stop where you are!" He still doesn't hear. Then the father thunders to his son. The people following up the trail say, "Listen to that father bellowing to his poor little boy." Then they come up the trail and learn why he raised his voice, and they might apologize. And I think we owe God an apology for misunderstanding the times that He's raised His voice.

Venden: So what you're really saying is that it's anger in the voice. It's the serious consequences that call forth such a serious warning.

AGM: He would spare us, that's the thing. It's like the tobacco problem, you know. People aren't believing, and so they're printing it in red and underlining it, and they're trying to find more ways to warn people.

Venden: *

AGM: That this is serious.

Venden: You gave a good deal of emphasis on the gospel, the word "gospel," meaning "good news." Still, it's hard to see how the second angel's message and the third is really good news.

AGM: Well, it also is very sad. Victory in the Great Controversy. There is great joy on the one hand, but God is going to lose vast numbers of His children. I see Him cry and smiling at the same time at the end. "We've won, but look how many We've lost." I just wouldn't want people to think the second angel is good news because the other side has taken a good beating, and the third angel is good news because at last the people who hurt me are going to be burned, and I'm going to watch with deep satisfaction. I hope no one thinks it's good news in that way. But there is another way in which it's good news. The news that in the third angel's message God is not torturing His children to death. If the death of Christ tells us how the wicked will die, God did not torture His Son to death. He sadly gave Him up, as He will give up the wicked in the end. That is also important good news. But you are right, it's not totally good news. It's also very sad.

Venden: Well, to look at it from the other way, if the gospel, as I think you were saying this evening, includes all three of these messages, then shouldn't we while preaching the gospel say

a great deal more about the destruction of the wicked, because the third message has something to say about that?

AGM: Yes, at least two reasons come to mind. Number one, we say we preach the three angels' messages, then we've got to preach number three, which is about destruction. But how can you preach the cross? If that's to demonstrate how the sinner dies, how can you preach the cross without preaching the destruction of the wicked? Or to turn it the other way around, to preach the third angel's message is to explain why Jesus died and how He died. So it's the message of the cross. And that's why we sometimes speak of the third angel's message as even being salvation by faith or righteousness by faith. It's only if we preach it aright, only if the third angel's message raises serious enough questions about the death of the wicked, that we go to the cross to find out by observing how Jesus died.

Venden: Why and how.

AGM: Why and how, and how the Father is involved.

Venden: Rather than God destroying in anger.

AGM: Yes, because the cross says there is no need to be afraid of God. He did not torture His Son.

Venden: Graham, you and I and I think many of our folks here in the congregation this evening know that our particular church of the Christian faith, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, is strongly connected with this third angel's message. How was it that this particular church became identified with a particular message, the third angel's message?

AGM: Because we're not identified with a message of destruction, strangely enough. That's true. I think, I was looking it up again today, it is a historical accident, in a way. We spoke of the first angel's message was given, and then the second, and then the third, and we do feel we're the people with the final message which is number three. I think it's impressive that the pioneer, though, would refer to the three angels' messages. I think that it's a barren message to preach number three alone. We should always preach all three.

Venden: Would you go so far as to say that there's something especially unique about this third message so that I might identify myself as a Seventh-day Adventist as a Christian who believes in the third message, the third angel's message.

AGM: Well, if one misinterpreted the third angel's message and took it just the way it reads without understanding what the rest of the Bible has said about it, then a Seventh-day Adventist is a Christian who believes in eternal torment.

Venden: Oh oh.

AGM: That would be an interesting description of us.

Venden: That's not what I had in mind.

AGM: No. But with a correct interpretation of the third angel's message, I believe, in the light of the cross, by calling people's attention to the meaning of the cross in the larger setting of the great controversy, we actually can bring a truly Biblical explanation of the awesome words of the

third angel. We owe it to people. As Paul says, "I am indebted to give this to people who believe in God but they're scared." That third angel's message is fearsome. But to explain it in the light of the rest of the Scripture, and particularly in the light of how and why Jesus died and how His Father was involved in Gethsemane and on the cross, is to bring a very heartening news to people. Serious, yes, but no need to be afraid of God.

Venden: Now, sometimes the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been tied with the third angel's message, but it's also true that our church has been identified, or it has been a kind of identifying mark, with three angels. I think of Alan Collins' beautiful work on that office over in * .

AGM: I drove by to take a look at it, because we lived within a few miles of * for years. There they are, right on the wall. You can see * .

Venden: Three angels.

AGM: Three angels.

Venden: And this is the same man who did the statuary out here, The Good Samaritan. I've been in many churches, the Mountain View Church, which you're acquainted with where I was pastor for awhile. When they finally came to putting these beautiful stained glass windows, why there are the three angels. How does that choice come about? Do you think it was a good one?

AGM: I think it was a very good choice, because the position that these three messages have in the Bible suggest they are the final messages of invitation and warning. They also, I think, provide a wonderful opportunity to summarize all the rest of Scripture. In fact, if you do those three without the rest of the Bible, they're fearsome, they're forbidding. But if you take those three in the light of all Sixty-six books. In fact, without the other Sixty-five, you can't explain the three angels' messages. So they really are an opportunity to demonstrate our conviction that we believe the whole Bible to be the word of God, that the whole Bible should be read as a whole and understand these three messages in the light of all that's gone before.

Venden: But that raises another question that comes up: Here we had this third angel's message, the bottom paragraph on our Bible Reference Sheet on the front page, and I'm tempted to ask why not just take this message just as it reads? You are talking about having to take all Sixty-six and interpret it in the light of all Sixty-six, but if the Bible just can be taken as it should be taken, just as it reads, why not read it and just believe it the way it says, that people are going to be burned forever, the smoke goes up forever and ever and so on?

AGM: Well, I would just have read in Jude, name of the book right before, that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with eternal fire, and that fire went out a long time ago. So the book of Jude has helped prepare me for these words in Revelation. Moreover, as I go through the Bible, I find the servant who doesn't want to be set free having a hole punched through the lobe of his ear, and he serves his master forever. So I've already been prepared by the rest of the Bible to understand this fire and its smoke that goes up forever and ever.

Venden: But you're saying then that I have to interpret.

AGM: That's right. To find its real meaning.

Venden: I can't just take those words right there? They have a content and history, so you say

that I have to work at understanding Scripture.

AGM: Now some folk will say, "Now, we must take that just the way it reads." And I'll say, "Well, let's turn over here to Deuteronomy 14 which says, 'Take the tithe and buy strong drink with it and rejoice before the Lord.'" And they'll say, "Oh no, don't take that just the way it reads; let's interpret that with care." And then we turn over to where it says, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery." And they will say, "Now, let's interpret that." And, "It would be better not to marry; it's all right if you can't control yourself." "Oh, let's interpret that." "Women shouldn't speak in church." "Let's interpret that." The third angel's message, "Let's take it just how it reads." Let's be consistent all the way through. We want to find the meaning. We don't want to escape the meaning. We don't want to cheat. I want to know exactly what it means.

Venden: So we can't be lazy.

AGM: * the whole Bible.

Venden: Now, in the light of our series and many times when you talked about there is no need to be afraid of God, I have to ask, how can you preach the three angels' messages without inspiring fear? Here even in the first message, Graham, is this note of judgment. That makes one feel a bit uneasy. How do you go to the second and the third? How can you preach judgment, for example, even in the first without producing fear?

AGM: This is a very good illustration of the points you made before. So we start to interpret. Now we did in our Conversation, in the one "There is no Need to be Afraid of God." We talked about judgment. However, this is interpreted variously. Some people who prefer a more legal model of things will say, "There is no need to be afraid in the judgment, because we have a Friend up there, not the Father; the Son. Oh, we have no need to be afraid, because the legal penalty has been paid. The Father is fearsome, but we're paid up. Don't worry." I believe the good news that we have no need to be afraid is based on the fact that our Friend up there is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three are our friend. We have much better reasons that sometimes given for facing the judgment unafraid. Therefore, one must interpret each of these items carefully, carefully. One could offer a wrong explanation of the three messages.

Venden: Back to the simplicity of Scripture, which I think even though you've challenged us to the hard work of thinking, yet still at its heart you've said the message really is simple enough that a child can understand. If that's true, then how could it be that we come up with different versions of the Gospel, and even within our own fellow, some considerable disagreement, even sometimes more heat possibly than light,

AGM: I think that's true.

Venden: Over the subject of what is the gospel? Why isn't it so simple that everyone would say, "Oh yes, fine, that's it, I agree?"

AGM: Well I think that's why Paul said, "Oh you dear idiots." I mean, it's so plain.

Venden: Are you pointing at me?

AGM: * point at the audience. The Galatians.

Venden: The Galatians.

AGM: He says, "Since the death of Christ was explained so clearly to you, how could you be such dear idiots as to go back to the other view?" Then he says, "Who has been casting a spell over you?" or some versions say, "Who has bewitched you?" You know, we cannot leave out the adversary. The gospel is what defeats him. And he is determined to twist and pervert it, not so much by contradicting it as by twisting it. I think we have many twistings of the good news. The adversary is there. But then allowing for some honest difference, you know we've all been conditioned by our parents and our teachers through the years. It's hard to give up our prejudices, so we should be patient with each other, but we should move toward that day. Well, that's coming up in two weeks. God is waiting for us to grow up and not be dear idiots any longer but have this thing clearly worked out so we would stick our lives on it and survive the time of trouble.

Venden: Is there a sense, though, in which the gospel is such a gem that we never will fully encompass all of its beauty? Can we go that far?

AGM: Oh, I like that. That was good to add. There are always different aspects, but the different facets will not contradict each other.

Venden: All right.

AGM: It's only worrisome when there's a contradiction. No, that's a very good point you've made. There will never one person see it all * choose to speak of it in the same way. Yes, that's very well said.

Venden: Here the last verse on our Bible Reference Sheet spoke of is Jesus' prediction and promise that the gospel will be preached in all the world. Now, since the three angels' messages are that gospel, we believe, and are to be proclaimed before the end comes, how widely are these messages being proclaimed?

AGM: And along with that, more important would be, if we could even document the fact that we were announcing on world-wide radio and television the three angels' messages, how sure can we be that we're giving them correctly? That would be the more worrisome thing, because there are different versions of them. So I would want to be sure of that. But then, to be able to tell the day? I don't think we'll ever know. We've just got to give it and go on giving it and cast your bread upon the waters, and the Lord will know when the work is done.

Venden: And when He comes, we will know that it was completed.

AGM: Yes, Paul was never so concerned to know when it was finished; he was concerned that it be done. He said, "I want to be here and there, I want to get to you in Rome, I'd like to get everywhere with this news." That should be our preoccupation, I think.

Venden: You spoke about this last sentence in the message here, Revelation 14:12. Is that really part of the third angel's message? What do you think? The punctuation here is a bit ambiguous.

AGM: It seems to be included, though the quotation marks close. Since I saw you earlier, I looked through many versions. None includes it as the words of the angel, but some want to tie this particularly to number three. It is so fearsome a message, it calls for the endurance of the saints. I think that's why they've put it, as I think in our text here.

Venden: Yes.

AGM: In the King James and the Revised Standard it's a separate part.

Venden: Would it be fair to say that in a sense, it summarizes the response to the whole thing?

AGM: I rather think so. And especially that dreadful number three. It would make no difference to the meaning, actually, how you punctuate it.

Venden: I guess that's true. I'm concerned about the wording here because this is a text that has been a favorite for many years. In the New International Version it talks about, "remaining faithful to Jesus." The King James, which I learned many years ago, talks about, "Having the faith of Jesus." What are we up against with that kind of interpretation?

AGM: Well interestingly, it's a technical thing, but to put it simply, the Greek can be translated, "Faith in Jesus," or, "The faith that Jesus had." And that's why some versions go one way, some go the other, and none are consistent in this.

Venden: How do you make that kind of choice as a Greek scholar?

AGM: Well, the context will sometimes indicate. Sometimes it makes no difference either way. I like in Revelation 14, since 13 talks of those who are loyal to the adversary, and 14 talks of those who in contrast who are loyal to the true Christ, I like the, "faithful to Jesus." But supposing it's the other way, "The saints are those who have a faith in God such as Jesus did," or, "The saints are those who trust in Jesus," we've got to come to exactly the same conclusion. So it really makes no difference. If I were to print it in my version, though, I'd like to have, "Remain loyal to or have faith in, trust in Jesus."

Venden: There's another word in here, "Here is the patience of the saints." I remember some of the translations say, "Here is the endurance of the saints." And now this one has, "Patient endurance."

AGM: That's an interesting combination here. There are two words, one is "patience," you know. "I am patiently waiting for the Lord to come; don't disturb me." The actual Greek word here means, "Remaining under," as if you were pushing something. You put your shoulder to the wheel, and you stay under, and you shove with all your might. That's the word here. "Endurance" is better. But the New International says, "This calls for patient endurance." That's really bridging them both.

Venden: That struck that that would be comparable to our colloquial expression today, "hanging in there."

AGM: That's true.

Venden: Standing under.

AGM: And it's not going to be easy. It calls for endurance.

Venden: Now, you did refer to this in the third message, this "mark of the beast." And Seventh-day Adventists are notorious, shall I say, famous, or well-known for emphasis upon the mark of

the beast. It seems to be very important to the message. What is it? Would you say a bit more about that?

AGM: Well, since such dreadful things happen to those who have the mark, we had better know something about it. As you know, there are many, many different views. Fortunately, though, there will be opportunity next time, when we talk about Satan's final effort to deceive, to go into this in more detail. In the meantime though, earlier in the book of Revelation it talks about God's loyal people having a seal. It seems they have some mark of loyalty and trust. And I would make this comparable. There's some indication that they prefer Satan's lies to the truth. They have accepted him, the false christ, as their redeemer. So we need to look for something that would be an appropriate mark. I'm very impressed with among the many, many meanings with the fact that if you go the "Vicarious Filii Dei," which you'll find not just Seventh-day Adventists have done that, many others too. The literal meaning is, "Substitute for the Son of God," which is exactly what Satan has wanted to be, substitute for the Son of God. But I'm more intrigued with the fact that you can find the very number, 666 back to the centuries and the millenia, connected with devil worship and other misrepresentations of the truth. The one thing sure, it is a mark of rejection of the truth, a preference for Satan's side and loyalty to him, whatever it is.

Venden: And you will be spending a bit more time on that next time.

AGM: Primarily on the issues more than the mark, whatever that mark is. Because you won't get the mark unless you prefer his side. So I'm more concerned about not being on his side, than what the mark might be. Because if I'm on the right side, I won't get it.

Venden: Good point. Now, here in the Maxwell version, I was intrigued by that version when I saw it on our-- I wondered if I could buy that in the Bible stores today? Have you concluded your translation?

AGM: I haven't gotten that far.

Venden: But anyway, in your reference, Romans 3:25,26, why do so many versions translate this passage to suggest that the gospel is not a revelation of God's character or the kind of Person God is, God's righteousness, but it's a revelation of God's activity, of the plan of salvation. What is the gospel, the truth about God, or is it the truth about how God saves us? Which would you say?

AGM: Ah, that's good.

Venden: Seems like that's an important distinction that you're making here.

AGM: Yes, the Greek says rather simply that the gospel derives its power from the fact that it reveals the righteousness of God. Now, right below, where it says, "The wrath of God is revealed," the Greek is the same, and if that's God's wrath one verse below, it's God's righteousness above. But many of our good Christian friends say, "Why would God's righteousness need to be revealed? He's the Sovereign, of course He's righteous." You see, following Luther's example, they have no great controversy over the character and government of God. In the larger, great controversy view, it's God's righteousness that has been challenged, and if God is not proved to be righteous, there is no basis for our trust. The good news is that God is righteous. Well, those who feel there has never been a conflict over His righteousness, chose something else, "It's God's way of righting you and me." What's beautiful about this,

though, is, if you take this as it literally reads, the good news is about God's righteousness, the revelation of God's righteousness is the way in which He rights you and me. And so the larger view contains the smaller view, but the narrow view denies the larger view. That's what I like about the larger view. You can be much more generous when you hold it. You can say, the beautiful Good News Bible, "God's way of righting wrong," or something like that. "God's way of setting men right with Himself." That's beautiful. But what is God's way of setting men right with Himself? It is an infinite cost to reveal and demonstrate the truth about His own righteousness. So I can say, "That's a nice version, but that's the narrow view." The larger great controversy view, which is our privilege to explain from the Sixty-six books, allows the Bible to be translated very literally there, and even leaves room for these narrower views which are more preoccupied with what God has done for you and me. To many of our friends, the good news is what God has done for you and me.

Venden: The plan of salvation.

AGM: The plan of salvation, you see. The larger view is: The good news is that God is not as His enemies have made Him out to be. He is instead, like this. And to see Him like that, to be won to repentance and faith, the plan of salvation has at its very heart the revelation and the demonstration of the truth about the righteousness of God. That's a more inclusive view. That's why we venture sometimes to call it the larger view.

Venden: I think it was just last week that a friend here turned in this question: "I understand the word `wrath' when the Bible speaks of Satan having great wrath, and the wrath of God are the same in the original language. How can we fit Satan's wrath into the picture you are helping us to see regarding God's wrath?" This ties in with the third angel's message.

AGM: Yes.

Venden: "Or could it be that I am misinformed regarding the original language?" Would you answer that?

AGM: The two main words for "wrath" in the Greek are ORGAI and there's DUMOS, sometimes translated "passion." Both words are used for God and for Satan, same words. Just as the word "faith" is used for "saving faith" and the faith the devils have that scares them. The only difference is when God expresses His wrath, He sadly gives us up. When the devil comes down with great wrath, he comes, "Like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." That's the difference between the two. Same words. The context has to indicate.

Venden: It has to do with the kind of person the devil is and that God is and what happens when they're * .

AGM: That's the difference.

Venden: All right. Another friend has raised this question. I think it's a very important one. "Are we going to have the same freedom that Adam and Eve had when we go to Heaven, free to choose, perfect freedom of choice? What about this matter of freedom which you stress so much throughout our series?"

AGM: Well, when you think of the price God has paid to show what freedom means to Him and to restore freedom, you could say, "Absolutely, yes."

Venden: The end of the conflict doesn't mean that freedom is gone.

AGM: On the contrary.

Venden: Let's move very quickly to one other one: "Why wasn't the conflict ended with Christ's victory at the cross and His resurrection? Why has pain and suffering gone on since then?" This has come up before, but another person wanted to know.

AGM: The fact that it keeps coming up suggests how important it is, and we have an evening coming up, "God Waits For His Children To Grow Up." In the narrower, more legal view, if it's done at the cross, why wait any longer? In the larger, great controversy view, there are terrible events to occur at the end, and there will need to be a generation not of children or even "dear idiots" of Galatia. There needs to be a group of Job's who are so grown up and settled into the truth, that like Paul, they could say, "If even an angel from Heaven should come with a different gospel," and there he is, pretending to be Christ, "he is wrong and we will not believe it." God in mercy waits.

Venden: Just a word about next Friday night, Graham.

AGM: "Satan's Final Efforts To Deceive."

Venden: What more important subject could we study to be prepared for these final days?

AGM: We could have done that tonight instead of fourteen, but I wanted to do the good news first.

Venden: See you next Friday night.