

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER EIGHTEEN

GOD WAITS FOR HIS CHILDREN TO GROW UP

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Number Eighteen: **"God Waits for His Children to Grow Up"** - another look at the reasons for the delay of the final events in the great controversy over the character and government of God.

Almost two thousand years have passed since God won His case on Calvary. Satan's lies and accusations have long ago been met. The freedom of the universe has been eternally secured. Why, then, does God still tolerate this one rebellious spot in His loyal universe? He longs to recreate our world and give it to His trusting saints. Why does He still wait?

When Jesus returns, He will come to a generation of believers who have experienced Satan's last supreme attempt to deceive and destroy God's loyal children on this planet. They will have accomplished what one third of the angels failed to do. They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. They will have been able to say with Paul, "If anyone - even an angel from heaven - should bring a different version of the everlasting good news, he is wrong, and we will not believe it!" (Galatians 1) These are not babes in the truth. They are grown-up believers. They meet the Biblical description of Christian perfection and maturity: they have "their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:6) They have not only the teachable faith of a little child, which still needs much protection, but - like Job - they can stand alone. Though their faith be severely tested, they will never let God down.

God is waiting for such firm believers. The last book of the Bible pictures the angels as mercifully holding back the final winds of strife until the minds of God's children have been unshakably sealed and settled into the truth.

But what is this truth? Remember the pious beliefs of those who nailed Jesus on the cross - then hurried home to keep the Sabbath holy? Do we accept Jesus' testimony about His Father? Are we convinced that God is just as gracious as the Son? Or are we still "easily swayed by every wind of doctrine"? (Ephesians 4) Do we still need emergency measures to be reverent, and do what is right? Are we the reason why God still waits?

Welcome to the eighteenth of our conversations about God - another look at our Heavenly Father in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government. The subject for our conversation this time is, "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up." This is an opportunity to consider a question that has been raised by many individuals during the course of these conversations.

Now it is true that almost two thousand years have passed since God won His case on Calvary. Satan's lies and accusations have long ago been met. The freedom of the universe has been eternally secured. Why do you think God still tolerates this one rebellious spot in His loyal universe? We know that He longs to recreate our world as described in Isaiah, Revelation, and elsewhere and give it to His trusting saints. Why then does God still wait?

We know that when Jesus returns, He will come to a generation of believers who will have experienced Satan's final desperate attempt to deceive and destroy God's loyal children on this planet. This generation of believers will have succeeded in accomplishing something that one third of the brilliant angels failed to do. They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. They will be able to say with Paul, "If anyone, even an angel from heaven, should

come with a different version of the everlasting good news - a different picture of God - he is wrong and we will not believe it." (Gal. 1:8,9)

Lest we underestimate the seriousness of these final times of confusion and deception and lest we underestimate Satan's cunning and persuasive power, there are vivid descriptions of this time to come, both in Old Testament and New, beyond even the ones that we talked about in our last conversation. Look at Daniel 12:1,3 (NIV). "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book - (Remember the book of Revelation 13, last time? The whole world will worship the adversary except those whose names were written in this book) will be delivered...Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." (Parentheses supplies)

Notice in this passage as in many others, the saints who survive the time of deception and confusion not only survive themselves, but they are always described as leading others to righteousness. Our concern is not only to survive, but to bear an encouraging witness to the truth about our God. Compare Paul's picture in the next text, 1 Timothy 4:1-3 (NIV), as to what it will be like in these last final days as Satan seeks to deceive. "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth."

I continued that passage to include "forbidding people to marry and ordering them to abstain from certain foods" to indicate the kind of thing that will be done in the last days to misrepresent our God. You recall that Satan has accused our God of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. Look at such arbitrary things as forbidding people to marry and to abstain from certain foods, evidently for ceremonial reasons. Wouldn't the devil love to have us forget how and why God gave us marriage in the Garden of Eden. What an eloquent representation of His willingness to share His creative power with us, enabling us to create little people in our own image. What an answer to Satan's charge that God selfishly refused to share His creative power. Satan would have us forget that and would forbid people, particularly those who want to be especially spiritual, to marry. He would forbid them to eat certain foods, not for health reasons, but for ceremonial reasons.

Compare also Paul's very dramatic description of Satan's purposes and methods in the next passage, 2 Thessalonians 2:1,3,4,6,7,9,10 (NIV). "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed...(Remember how sin is defined as lawlessness in 1 John 3:4). He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God... (Remember our earlier conversation when we talked about **"The Conflict in God's Family"** - what the devil really wants.) And now you know what is holding him back...For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; (This was in the 50's AD) but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way...The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (Parentheses supplied)

You notice the contrast in all these passages between deceit on Satan's side and the truth on God's side. Because truth and evidence are not on the adversary's side, Satan cannot use evidence. He cannot dare invite inquiry and investigation, as God can with perfect safety and freedom. In order to win his case, the devil always has to use things like counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders to persuade. Are you impressed with how much of this is going on at the present time?

Now people who survive this period of extreme deception and confusion are certainly not babes in the truth. Rather, they are grown-up adult believers. They meet the Biblical description from an earlier conversation, "**God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done**", of perfection and Christian maturity. These are people who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Though their faith be severely tried, they will never let God down. They have more than the faith of a little child. They still have that. But when one has the faith of a little child, he still needs much protection. These saints, like Job, can stand alone.

I understand that God is waiting for such firm believers. He waits in mercy because He loves His children. He is not willing that any of them should be lost. God knows that if these final awesome closing events should be allowed to come too soon, His children would be unready. They would be confused and some deceived. You recall from an earlier conversation, He would never allow anyone to be tested more than He is able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Of course, He waits.

The last book of the Bible pictures angels mercifully holding back the final winds of strife until God's children have been unshakably sealed and settled into the truth. It makes sense that He should do so. How consistent with what we know to be true about our God. Look, for example, at Revelation 7:1-3 (RSV). "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels...`Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.'" The closing events of human history are being held back because we have not yet been sealed.

What could it mean to be sealed? What would sealing mean to the early Christians when they heard this section of Revelation being read out loud to them? Had they received any help in understanding the meaning of sealing? It is as likely as not this book was first read in Ephesus. That is where the scroll arrived from the Isle of Patmos. Someone arose and read it out loud. If it was in Ephesus, you recall Paul's letter that eventually became known as the letter to the Ephesians, Paul has quite a lot to say about the sealing and how this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Ephesians 4:30 (NIV) for example. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." That raises the question of how is the Holy Spirit involved in our being sealed? Look now at Ephesians 1:13 (RSV). "In Him (that is, in union with Christ) you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." (Parentheses supplied)

Note the emphasis on truth, the emphasis on the gospel, the good news, along with this sealing work of the Holy Spirit. What is this truth? What is this good news? It is the whole subject of our conversations about God. The truth and the good news is that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. You could finish that good news by now, I am

sure. Compare then, Ephesians 1:17 (NIV). "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better." Notice "to know Him better". That is the truth. That is the good news. This is the work of the Spirit of truth.

You remember how much Jesus said about the Holy Spirit coming to lead us into truth so that we might know the Father better. There is so much of it in John. It would have filled many pages. Look at John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13 (Phillips). "The Holy Spirit...will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you...When the Helper comes, that is, the Spirit of Truth...He will speak plainly about Me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about Me... (Notice the two always go together. We also speak plainly. The Spirit helps us to see the truth. We help other people to see the truth.) He will guide you into everything that is true." (Parentheses supplied)

Now John who wrote about sealing in Revelation 7, also wrote the gospel in which he included so much information about the Holy Spirit coming to guide us into the truth, to convince us of the truth, to settle us into the truth. He also knew about Paul's information given in his letter to the Ephesians. John knew when he wrote that the believers would have some background for understanding what it would mean to be sealed. It means to be so settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved. Some of you know who wrote those great words. (see 4BC 1161)

Now in more detail, what is this truth in which we simply must be settled and sealed, so that despite the devil's most convincing efforts to the contrary, we cannot be moved? What would you suggest for the list of truths? Is it the truth that God exists and that He is infinitely powerful? Well, the devils believe that and it scares them (see James 2:19). Is it the truth that the end is coming soon? Satan agrees that it is coming soon and he works all the harder (Rev. 12:12). He is settled into those two things.

Is it the truth that the seventh-day is the Sabbath? Is it the truth that we should keep all ten of the Ten Commandments; that we should read our Bibles faithfully as God's word? Is it the truth that we should pay a careful tithe and be very careful about what we eat and be very careful how we associate with sinners who might lead us astray? I don't want to minimize those matters. Should we not recall, as a warning, the very pious beliefs and practices of those who nailed Jesus to the cross and then rushed home to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, with their tithe paid up and no forbidden food in their stomachs. Evidently the truth into which we must be sealed is far more than just the list of beliefs I mentioned, important as they are.

Throughout the Bible, the all important truth, the saving truth, is above all else the truth about our God. Jesus came to bring us this truth about His Father, so that we might be won back to God in love and trust. God can heal and save all who trust Him. You remember all that Jesus said in the verses from John 14 that we previously read. When the Spirit comes, He will bring to our remembrance the things that Jesus has said about the Father. Remember in Ephesians 1:17 we read that the Holy Spirit may come so we may know God better. That is the consistent picture of the truth, the subject of the truth, the essence of the truth, that runs all through Scripture.

Could I ask, do you, do we, really accept Jesus' picture of the Father? Do we really accept the testimony of Jesus about His Father? Let's be really specific. Take John 16:26 - a statement about His Father that Jesus said has no symbols in it. It is not a figure of speech. It is

not a parable. He said the time has come for me to tell you plainly and clearly about My Father. You know the words that follow. We have talked about them previously. "There is no need for Me to pray the Father for you. For the Father Himself loves you." Do you accept that? Do you so accept it that it is an integral part of your whole theology and understanding of the plan of salvation? Are you still unable to accept what Jesus described as a plain, clear statement of the truth about His Father? There is no need for the Son to plead with the Father in our behalf, because the Father loves us just as much as the Son.

Let's recall other things that He said. The Spirit brings these back to our remembrance. (John 12:44-50; John 14:7-9). "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." "If you know Me, you know the Father." Do we believe that the Father is just as gracious as the Son? Is that an integral part of our Christian theology? Did anyone need to reconcile Christ Jesus to us as sinners? Did anything need to be done to assuage and appease the wrath of gentle Jesus and win Him to our side? Then, if we believe the testimony about the Father, nothing had to be done to reconcile the Father to us either. He loves us just as much as the Son.

Are we so settled into this truth about our God that we cannot be moved? Are we still easily swayed to and fro by every wind of doctrine? Remember Ephesians 4:14,15 (NEB). "We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ."

We should ask ourselves, "Are we still such children in the faith, babes in the truth, that we need emergency measures to be reverent toward our God and to do what is right?" If we still need those measures, we are still babes. So Paul also wrote Hebrews 5:13,14; 6:1 (NIV). I like to say Paul wrote this. The language sounds more like Luke sometimes, but that great physician and that great minister worked together until the end. "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity."

What are the elementary teachings about Christ? What are "the rudiments of our beliefs", as some versions have it? Well, let us ask ourselves: Do we still need the law in order to love God and love each other, and not hate and desire to murder our enemies? Would we murder them if there were no law that says we must not do it? If it is the law that keeps you from murdering your mother-in-law, then you are still very much a child and not ready for the awful time of trouble.

Let me ask it another way. Which moves you more, the thunders of Sinai or the still, small voice of truth? Satan is going to bring great thunder and fire from heaven in the sight of men, miracles and wonders. (see Rev. 13) If that is what moves us, then we are very vulnerable. We are still babes in the truth. God has used those methods with babes, but He waits for us to grow up. The one thing that the devil cannot come with is the still, small voice of truth, for it is not with him. We must be ready to recognize that as the supreme authority.

Do you obey because God has told you to and He has the power to reward and destroy? That is the obedience of a little child. Do you obey because God has told you to and you love Him and want to please Him? Is that the only reason why you don't murder your enemies? It upsets Him. And you want to please Him. That is sweet, but still the faith of a little child. Or do you do what is right, because it is right? Do we offer God the

intelligent agreeing obedience of free, grown-up children of our Heavenly Father? That is what pleases Him most. Then we are ready for the days to come.

Are we still preoccupied with our own salvation and with what God has done for me, and you too, to be sure? Do we see the plan of salvation in the larger view, the great controversy view, the involvement of the whole universe and the most important truth of all? The reason why Christ died, above all else, is the truth. The demonstration of the truth about our Heavenly Father establishes this universe safe and free for all eternity. It is the way we are saved too, that is true, but there was a far larger purpose in the plan of salvation than just to save you and me.

Do you still demand vengeance on your enemies, tit for tat, an eye for an eye? Of course, you wouldn't call it that. You would call it justice. Do you demand that your enemies suffer all that they deserve, in the final fire at the end, or you will not be satisfied? Now you might say, "that isn't a bad thing". It is just that you have now become so just that your sense of justice must be satisfied. Do you demand that wicked people get precisely what they deserve or you will not be satisfied? Would you refuse to revere a God Who would be so soft as to do anything else?

Or, are you ready to join our Heavenly Father as He cries, as He watches His rebellious children reap the consequences of their own rebellious choice? God does not turn His back on His sinful children. He watches them as they die. He is not torturing them to death. He leaves them to reap the consequences. If you still desire vengeance, though you may call it justice, you are acting like a little child.

When Paul was a grown-up man and the religious leader of his people, he realized that in his legalistic theology he was still a little child. Then when he learned the truth about God, he began to grow up and put away childish things and he wrote 1 Corinthians 13:11 (RSV). "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; (That is why I thought it was all right to stone Stephen to death in God's name) when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." (Parentheses supplied)

Now there *is* a time in life when it is appropriate to be a child, to believe what we are told, and even to do what we are told. But since the enemy of God and man is still abroad in the land, while we are still children, we need much protection. We need the emergency measures to help us believe and do what is right. God has been willing to give them to us and we thank Him for them. But in the last days, there will be no protection. Satan will even twist all the emergency measures that God has used to support his own position and to put God in a very bad light. In those days we will need to be really grown-up.

Job was grown-up, and consider the ways in which Satan sought to break him down and undermine his trust in God. I wish we could include the whole book of Job in this paper. You remember the story. God said, for important great controversy reasons in chapter 1 and 2, "Satan you may do anything you like to this man, except take his life. He will not let Me down." Satan set out to destroy him. He destroyed his family. He destroyed his estate. He destroyed his reputation. He destroyed his health. Then he set out to undermine Job's theology - Job's picture of God. Three or four friends came to help him. But those friends did not know God very well at all. In fact, the God they worshipped was arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. If only those friends had known the larger view. If only they had known about the great controversy. If only those friends had known what we now know from chapters 1 and 2! Think how they could have helped poor Job. What a blessing they could have been to him. Instead

Job said, "Miserable comforters are you all." You are only making things worse. (Job 16:2)

I wouldn't want to be misunderstood. Is it not significant to note that perhaps the greatest distress that came to Job, came from the bad theology of his well-meaning, but mistaken friends? Could it come this way in the last days? Caring theologians who did not know God, but had a very legal view of things, caused Job great distress. But he would not be deceived even by them.

In the last days, our experience will be very much like that of Job. If we do not have the larger, whole-Bible, all-Sixty-six-books, great-controversy, universe-wide understanding of God and the great controversy and the plan of salvation, we will not be safe ourselves, and we will be no help to anyone else. We will be very vulnerable when Satan seeks to deceive us that God is an arbitrary, vengeful Deity.

It seems to me that a great deal of current Christian theology is preoccupied with our legal standing with our God. Is that why God still waits and waits until we grow up into a much larger understanding of the truth? Without that larger understanding of the truth, we will never survive the time of trouble. So, Paul says in Ephesians 6:11-14 (NEB). "Put on all the armor which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, (Do you know what the Greek word is - **cosmocrats**, not democrats or aristocrats, but cosmocrats, rulers of the cosmos, cosmic powers. We know who they are) against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens; (where the war began, remember). Therefore, take up God's armor; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. Stand firm, I say. Fasten on the belt of truth. . ." (Parentheses supplied) We know what that truth is, the good news about our God.

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Conversations About God - Tape 18B

Venden: One question was handed in right at the end of the meeting; and she's here. Good. All right. Here's the question: Can one be sealed, and then later be unsealed?

Now, I'm glad you asked that; because that was one I wanted to ask. I think it's a good question.

Maxwell: I think that's an excellent one.

Venden: The two of us thought of that. She goes on and says, "Or: If you are sealed forever, does that mean you can't fall away?"

Maxwell: Hmm.

Venden: What about that?

Maxwell: That question has come up in other ways, although this is a very good way to raise it: Do we lose our freedom? Are we placed beyond the possibility of ever rebelling? If so, the freedom is gone. And in fact, Luther hints at that in his comments on Genesis; that at a certain time everyone is placed beyond the possibility of sinning again. Then freedom has been limited.

No, we'll be more free than ever. And we'll realize are freedom. We'll always be free to even walk into the temple and hit God, and spit in His face. We won't want to do it. Well, Lucifer didn't think he would either, at first. He was settled into the truth. He was God's best representative, His best spokesperson. He went out among the angels to describe God's purposes, and character to the other lesser angels. And yet, later on he turned it down. And later on totally denied what he once knew to be true. That's why his sin is so serious. He once knew it very well, and he has now completely turned it down.

So I would say, it can be lost. You see, the seal is often thought to be: We will now be fixed forever. Well, if you can be fixed ever, why didn't God fix us in the beginning? See, if you can ever be fixed, then it's really His fault that we ever went wrong, because He should have created us fixed in the first place. So He would deny all He's paid such a price to reveal, if He were to fix us in the end. We will still be free.

So we're dependent upon the verse that says, you know, that distress and trouble will not arise again. The most we interpreted that one time—I remember we discussed it—it's not that it couldn't arise again. Is it God's foreknowledge saying, "It won't arise again"? Now, those of you who believe God cannot foreknow moral choice, then He can't say it won't arise again, because He doesn't know. But I prefer not to limit God this way. And I'd be happy to have God say, "As I look down into the future, you'll all be free; but you never will rebel again."

Of course, there is another alternative. If rebellion should arise again, and an enemy arise and seek to undermine trust in God, and God were to leave him this time to reach the natural consequences of such rebellious, disorderly, destructive behavior, he would die -- as Satan would have in the beginning, had God left him. But this time there would be no danger of God being misunderstood as having executed someone who disagreed with Him. They'd know that God was simply leaving him to reap the natural results. And the death of this new rebel would not lead to theophobia, and to people serving God from fear.

So because of the revelation, it never will be the same. He'd never have to repeat this. It'll never have to be done. Although those who believe we're going to forget all the evidence in the hereafter, have a real problem. You see, some say we'll be safe in the hereafter because nobody will ever remember anything bad anybody did. But the bad things we did and the remedies that were applied, are all part of the evidence. God will not win on the basis of evidence, and then destroy the evidence and hold it secure in some other way. The evidence will always be there. I'm sure there'll be at least one version — surely the King James — in the Heavenly Museum. You know. Which one would you nominate?

I mean, the stories will be there. Go and ask David if you want to - but ask him very nicely - about some of the things he did. I don't think we'd want to ask Rahab what her former profession was like; it wouldn't be nice. But we'll remember. How marvelous to see Rahab.

It's like Onesimus the slave, you know. If tradition is right, that slave was well-treated by Philemon; and became the bishop of Ephesus later on. And so we'll meet a man of great dignity, who once was a runaway slave.

It wouldn't hurt to remember those things. From the perspective of eternity. And that all constitutes evidence, a great weight of evidence, that we'll take seriously forever. And sin not arise again. Or if it should stir itself in some perverse mind, God could handle it— in a different way now. There's no need to repeat the demonstration. What do you think about that?

Comment: I've been growing in a new understanding of the verses in Ephesians 4. And they fit right in with the body, and how God would help us grow up as we understood our unity in body.

Maxwell: Ah, that's great in there. . .

Comment: You didn't mention that tonight when you mentioned growing up. And I'm wondering if understanding this, which the Adventist Church has really not talked much about— this unity in body; is that part of helping us grow up, and do we need that to help us grow?

Maxwell: Well, can you guess that in the Conversation About the Church that that passage will be in there, you know? You see. Sure. The unity that is inherent in the fact that we love, trust and admire the same God and the same Christ. And one of the functions of the church is to help us see that, and celebrate that, be reminded of that. The stronger one's helping the weaker ones; the more mature ones, the less immature ones. The church is like a family. Recognizing all these differences among us, that we can all help each other.

Comment: Then we need each other to grow; we can't grow . . .

Maxwell: It's difficult to grow alone. You don't know that you're growing at a funny angle, maybe - you know. So it's like it helps to have a wife who will say, "You have adopted a funny little tic on television, I see. Why are you twitching your - whatever?" I mean, nobody can tell you like your wife, you know. "Why do you rub your nose every five minutes?" You know. So, it was not good even for Adam to be alone. He needed somebody to talk to him. And if you can have a large and very friendly family, and there's security there, and we can talk to each other, there's great mutual benefit.

So, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," you remember, the apostle said. But

that's not a requirement, see. That's not an arbitrary requirement. It's if you don't do it, you will sense a loss. And God would spare us that loss.

Now that Ephesians section. Look for it; it will surely be in there on the sheet on Conversations About the Church. Yes.

Venden: In the Bible Reference Sheet, I have really appreciated how thoughtfully you've introduced the subject. And usually in your presentation, you've drawn on this material. But there was one sentence here that I would have liked to have you comment a bit more on. You talk about this group when Jesus comes. They have not only the teachable faith of a little child - which still needs much protection; but like Job, they can stand alone. Though their faith be severely tested, they will never let God down. You used that phrase "standing alone" one Friday Night a couple of weeks ago. When you talk about "alone," do you mean without God?

Maxwell: You'd never last very long. However, you might at the moment almost feel that He. . .

Venden: As Jesus felt on the cross? Are you suggesting an analogy?

Maxwell: Yeah, well, Job says, "I cry to You, and You do not answer me." It seemed as if God had deserted him. He says, "I don't think You have; but if You haven't, let me know You're there. Talk to me, God. You always used to talk to me. Why aren't You talking to me now?" That's what caused him his anguish. He didn't want to be alone. But he seemed to be alone. He knew better. Of course, God allowed the adversary to do anything he wanted to him, short of taking his life.

Venden: A person that's settled into the truth, then— if I'm understanding you correctly, you're saying that person is so settled into the truth, that shorn of many supporting things that we value very highly - such as friends, and maybe even some answers to prayer, that have encouraged us in the path, and so on - facing an apparently totally hopeless situation; our trust doesn't waver. Is that what [saying here]?

Maxwell: That was the case with Job. He says, "Though the Lord slay me, yet I'll still trust Him." And if we know the larger view, we would know why we might even appear to be alone in the last days. We'd know that if we really were alone, the adversary would dispatch the whole lot of us. So evidently there's still some protection, even. But not protection from his deceptive wiles. Just protection from his destructive power. Other than that, we're fully exposed.

Venden: Not necessarily protection from boils.

Maxwell: That's right. Look at poor Job in every way! I'm thinking too of Paul. When he went up for his trial in Rome, he said, "No one stood with me; not anybody; not even my friends." He said, "I was all by myself." Of course, then he'd always say, "But I feel very much in union with the Lord." Yes, so that's always there.

Venden: So we're not alone as far as God is concerned. That is to say, God hasn't deserted us. However, our perceptions and the things that we might be tempted now to base our confidence upon, may have been shorn away.

Maxwell: Yeah, and even though Job - because he doesn't know yet why that all happened to

him. You know.

Venden: He hasn't read the first two chapters of the book!

Maxwell: He hasn't read the first two chapters, you see. But when Job finds out, he will know that true God allowed the adversary to do anything he like to him, short of taking his life. Which means that God was restraining the adversary, who would have loved to have dispatched Job saying all those good things about God. He'd love to silence him. Job now knows that the whole universe was watching him. God was saying to the angels, "Look at My friend Job. I told you he wouldn't let Me down." I mean, he wasn't in the dark alone. He appeared to be at the time. But Heaven was focusing all its attention on Job. And very proud of him. So in that sense he really wasn't alone.

If it would help to know all these things -- you know, I really think; if only those friends had known what we know from chapters one and two. See, they could have come to Job and said, "You know why this is going on? It isn't that you offended God and therefore He can't bless you; if you'll confess your sin then He can bless you and you'll be rich again." That very legal view. They could have said, "Job, we have interesting information for you. Do you know, that up in Heaven when the family of the universe last met, Satan accused you and God; and that's why this is happening to you?" And Job says, "Now you're beginning to make sense. Tell me more! Tell me about the larger view."

The larger view would have made sense of that whole thing to Job. But the friends knew nothing about it. And I believe in the end, when we're going through this awful experience and appear to be alone, if we don't know what's in Job 1 and 2 -- that's one of the great pictures of the great conflict, you know, and Satan's charges. And God's answers are not, "Satan, you're lying about Job." God's answer is, "I'll show you." See, Job demonstrated what a trusting friend he was.

If we know that in the last days, that will see us through, too. I don't see people surviving without the larger view. The narrower, legal view, which is maybe appropriate for a beginning child, will not see folks through. We'll be saying things like Job's friends. God loved those friends, though they were wrong. Because He said, "Job, pray for them. They really need your help." They were stunned. They'd come to pray for Job. You know. And when God finally appeared, you know, and seemed to correct Job, and Job says, "I repent"; they were feeling very satisfied: "We can go home now. The Lord has endorsed our message." And God said, "You have not said of Me what is right, as My servant Job has." "Did we hear You right, Lord?" "Yes." He repeats it, doesn't He? Twice. "You have not said about Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

They were simply stunned! Because there's nobody more convinced that he's right, than a long proponent of the narrow, legal view. You can become very rigid in that view, as witness the people who crucified Christ. They knew they were right. You think Saul didn't know he was right when he set out on his evangelistic tour that time? It took a two-by-four to, you know, shake it loose a little, so he'd pay attention to the larger view.

That larger [sic] view may have been appropriate at sometime. But if I could run the risk of saying it, I really believe that the closer we come to the end, the less and less appropriate will be dependence on and presentation of the narrower, legal view. The preachers of the legal view are not the preachers for this time. It won't finish the work. The work is finishing work, not a

beginning work. We have a marvelous thing to say. And of course, when you get into this larger view, then healing makes sense. Of course. God can completely heal the damage done; He does not destroy, He's a Healer. The results of sin are consequence, not punishment. Lung cancer isn't punishment; it's consequence. And so on.

Healing is an eloquent demonstration. And the reason why some wonder why we ought to have Loma Linda here, you know, and why we devote so much time to the practice of the healing arts is, they are so wedded to the narrow, judicial, forgiveness view; that that's the main thing; that really this healing ministry - well, it is a way of attracting attention and helping pay for the freight, of delivering the gospel to the world. But if you take the larger view, the knowledgeable Christian practice of the healing arts, is a most specifically eloquent way of saying, "This is what God is like. These are the consequences of sin. These are the remedies." And it all makes good sense.

And that's why, when we were a tiny church, we were led to get involved in the practice of the healing arts. We were a little, teeny weeny church; and there we were doing that thing in Battle Creek. Except eventually it theologically got out of hand. And you see, when the practice of the healing arts is not connected to a true picture of God, it's devastating. And that's what happened at Battle Creek—the Alpha and the Omega. What went wrong was, there was not a true picture of God. Who was supplying the true picture of God? Well, that's the work of the ministry. And you see, when the ministry does not have an adequate picture of God, then the practice of the healing arts doesn't have an adequate justification. And that's why there was a falling out. And you can't say which side was at fault. Both sides did not have a good picture of God. And that led to that great experience in Minneapolis, when the picture of God began to be seen. And Ellen White endorsed it enthusiastically. But you remember the story from then on.

I think that the role of healing will be seen for its tremendous significance when it's done in the right way - in a Christian way; when we begin giving the larger, great controversy, healing, trust, evidence view. Then healing will really come into its own.

Well, what if we ministers don't do it? Why can't doctors see it? Nurses, and others, see it? Maybe you'll have to lead out. Nothing wrong with that. Everybody who is convinced of the truth, ought to lead out. You notice, the more we're settled into the truth, the more we bear witness to it, in several of those texts that we read. The more one is sealed into the truth, the more one leads others into the truth. You notice how—the number of times—the two will go together.

Ellen White even says, "It is a law," you know, "that the more we see the truth, the more we will bear witness to it." If we're not bearing witness, we probably aren't that settled. The one who's uncomfortable theologically isn't likely to go out and raise the subject very often. It's when we feel settled into the truth, even when questions are raised you don't know the immediate answer to. You know how to handle it. You can go home and study it. You have a way of fielding questions within the larger view. There's a security there. Then you don't mind bring religion up even on the plane.

Someone leans over and says, "Why did you do that?" "Well, I'll give you a reason. It's going to ruin the rest of my trip. I was going to read a magazine. Now I've got to talk theology all the rest of the way." But you're not scared that you're going to get in over your depth. Now, if you're going to sit and defend our church for four hours, then it's going to be difficult. But if you're going to spend four hours speaking well of God, you can't miss there! I mean, He's always good news. There are no flaws there. The good news is about Him, not about us. That's part of the Larger

View. So.

Venden: All right.

Comment: Speaking about the sealing and so forth, I've heard that it is associated to a period or time when God will retract his Spirit, that you'd better be sealed, because otherwise you won't make it. Does that really make sense?

Maxwell: Ah, the sound has a certain arbitrary sound to the thing. There will be a period when there is "no protection" as there was for Job. In fact the similarities are so close. The saints live through the time of trouble. You remember the words that Satan will not be allowed to destroy them, any more than he was allowed to destroy Job. I mean, it speaks well of God, that they live through it. They have something to say. But beyond that, there's no protection. So they just need to be settled into the truth in order to survive. That's the only reason. It's not an arbitrary thing. It's not arbitrary on the calendar either. When they are settled, then the end will come. In mercy, He waits till then.

It has often been made every artificial. I remember going through a period in my life, when I almost saw someone going around stamping people, you know, and the day might come when you could see it around the room: You're Kosher; you're prime; you're choice; you're for dog food; you're glue— you know, in a meat packing plant. A terrible thing. God would never do that.

By the way, in that connection - we could have done this all this series, but we haven't on purpose; because I want to show the larger view is in Sixty-six books. It's all there, all by itself. We don't need anything else. But the reason why I enjoy Ellen White's writings so much is, she espouses the larger view. And I find her in total harmony with the Sixty-six books. I've never had to choose between the two.

So, what about sealing? You think she'd have a rather arbitrary, artificial explanation? No. She says, "To receive the seal or mark of God, is not to receive any sign or mark that can be seen. It means rather to be so settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that we cannot be moved." Indeed, she says as soon as we are so settled, the shaking time will come. And this is what God's waiting for. Now, doesn't that make sense? You know. That's her explanation.

Venden: We had a question back here.

Comment: As I told you earlier, I really admire your work. I've been going to some of your Sabbath School lessons and some of these at night. And I love what you say about God. And the fact that God is like Jesus. But really - -

Maxwell: That's a nice title: God is like Jesus. That would make a good title. That's beautiful.

Comment: And vice versa. But in reading the Old Testament, it bothers me. There is so much cruelty, much of it in the name of God. Job, for instance. You know, he's a peach of a fellow. But what happens with his family? Weren't they God's children too? And, you know, there are examples all through the Old Testament, as most people know. You know. But I just want to get your comments on this.

Maxwell: Ah, fair enough. More questions have come in on that - written questions - than any

other subject. The apparent cruelty, the destruction, the wrath of God. The apparent unfairness in the Old Testament. Job's children; the children in the Flood, the children of Achan. Oh, it's a long, long list; and it doesn't stop in the Old Testament. You come over to the New, and Ananias and Sapphira cheat with their offering - die right on the church floor. And then you come to the Third Angel's Message; and there's more fire and brimstone in that message than anywhere else in the Bible. It never ends, does it?

So what can one do with this? Well, on the principle of here a little and there a little; just skip those passages. But you can't do that, you know. You can't build a model on selected passages from Scripture, unless you're prepared to say, "I am in a position to determine which parts of the Bible are the inspired word of God, and which are not." Now, no one's going to be arrogant to do that. We take the Bible as Jesus did. He took the Old Testament just as it was: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms— the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. And Paul, and Peter, and others did exactly the same. That's why again I like Ellen White. She takes all Sixty-six. She never corrects them. She never says, "I am a higher authority than Scripture." She says, "Submit my writings to the Scriptures."

There have been other leaders in the past who have said, "The Scriptures are only dependable to the extent that they agree with my interpretation." You know. And some have even corrected the whole Bible; put out issues of the Bible with corrections. She never did any such thing. The Bible was always the ultimate authority. I wish folk knew that this was true.

So taking it as a whole, we run almost immediately in the Bible into the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah, and poor Lot's wife; and all those other stories that follow along. Well, we think of options as we go along, if it's the first time through. And one option is: Well, that couldn't be Jesus. You know that. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who looks upon this little child, would never order the stoning of Achan's children. And so you assume it's somebody else. Well, it's the One called God in the Old Testament. And some people settle for that. And they build a whole system of theology on this.

There's God the Father, the fearsome One. The One for whom you really should feel a measure of theophobia. But there is a Friend between. There is Jesus, who, by the way, was not so friendly and understanding before He came and learned how hard it is to be good. But He came, and was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, so that He might learn to be a merciful and faithful High Priest. So He's gone back up to Heaven to inform the Father how much harder it is to be good than the Father ever supposed. So They have an arrangement now, with the Son pleading with the Father. And when the Father's anger boils up as He looks at some of us who have misbehaved so ungratefully; the Son says, "Remember, remember. Remember how I propitiated that wrath. And I have given a way, by which Your justice may be maintained, even though You forgive this person. I even feel, God, You don't even want to forgive this person. But I do. I say, "Please, forgive."

And we build a whole structure on this thing. The cross, the intercession, the judgement. In fact, we do things that seem nice and innocent. Like, "When your name comes up in the judgment, are you afraid?" "No. Because we have a Friend in court." "Who is the Friend?" And usually an audience will respond, "Jesus." And then you say, "Well, it wouldn't be the Father, would it." You say, "Well, I didn't mean that; no, I mean— but Jesus is the Friend."

Look, if the Father's just as friendly as the Son, you didn't need to say that. You could say,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all on our side. Romans 8. And you say, "Well, then why is Jesus up there pictured as interceding in our behalf, as our Advocate?" Well, why is the Holy Spirit described as our Advocate in Romans 8 also? Interceding for us with sighs too deep for words. And why does Paul say, "God is for us"? Who can be against us? Could it be the Son? Could it be the Holy Spirit? You know the answer is no to that. Then who is against us?

Now we're into the larger view. And without the larger view, you see, we have trouble with these theological matters. Who is against us and accuses us day and night before our God? Who accused Job before the Father, and who defended him? Just Satan accused. And who defended: Father, Son or Holy Spirit? It doesn't need to say. All right, who accused Joshua the High Priest before God? Zechariah 3. Who defended?

All right, if we are being accused - for the enemy of God is our enemy too - if this accuser of the brethren, who accuses us day and night before our God Revelation 12:10 - if he should choose to accuse you or me, he could do a pretty good job, couldn't he! When he's through, who would arise -- if it would make any sense to do so; if it would be possible to do so -- and speak a word in our behalf. Such as saying, "Everything the devil has said about this person is true; except it's not up to date. This person has a new heart and a right spirit now, this thief on the cross who only lived a little while after rebirth and conversion. And all the devil has done, is recount all the sins he's committed up to that time."

You don't think the devil is going to say, "By the way, you know how this ended: This man died trusting God, and has a new heart and a right spirit." The devil's not going to mention that. Who is? Why, our Friend up there - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But especially the One who in His human form, with the marks on His human form, so eloquently reminds the angels of all these things they need to be reminded of. For it to be safe for God to do the things that He's doing, and proposing to do. Because they've heard these charges. His physical appearance reminds them of the answers. And they say, "God, go ahead; do it. This man has an awful record. But does he trust You? Is he willing to listen? Does he at least have the faith of a little child? If You let him in, will he accept correction?"

And if the Lord says, "I know that person by name; I know what he's like; he's really converted; it's safe to let him in," and the angels all nod in agreement. And maybe one will say, "You can let him live next door to me if You like." And you know the one who could say that most impressively, would be your guardian angel. And I think I must have mentioned before: I could imagine my guardian angel occasionally asking for a transfer. [Laughter] You know. Who wants to be the guardian angel over a loser? At bad times in our lives.

What about Manasseh's guardian angel saying, "Lord, You say he died with a new heart and a right spirit? Then I trust Your diagnosis enough. You can assign him to live next door to me." Ah, that would be a tribute of faith in God's diagnosis. And say something about that guardian angel, wouldn't it? But if we don't feel that way, then there'll be dis-ease in the hereafter. "Oh boy, we let Manasseh in? And we let - name some others - in." I mean, imagine letting David in with his weaknesses for pretty angels, and so on. I mean, you know, that would be a little dangerous. They want to know up there if he has a new heart and a right spirit.

By the way, that's the opposite from worrying about whether or not David was legally adjusted. Was he forgiven? There's no reassurance in God saying, "Manasseh is forgiven." Is Manasseh changed? Change is the essence of the larger view. Forgiveness is the essence of the

theophobic view. A fearsome but just God, but He has been satisfied. He may forgive, and if you've been forgiven, you have nothing to worry about. You won't go to Hell. Others will, but you won't.

I'm caricaturing it to the extreme, but that's not far off from the way it's often presented.

Venden: A young lady here had a question.

Comment: If the seal of God is being settled into the truth, does that mean that the sealing is gradually taking place now? And when is it going to end?

Maxwell: Yes, I think it's going on all the time. Because if it had reached its conclusion, He'd be here as quick as He could. I don't think He'll wait a minute after His children are ready. We either settled one way, or settled the other way.

Now, we can't be settled until the Gospel goes to all the world. So that's part of it. So as we get more settled, then we will say more about our God. It will spread the world around; and it won't be so complicated but that simple folk can see it and say, "I much prefer that picture of God. I could trust that God. I'd stake my life on that picture."

When that has spread the world over and people have preferred Satan's lies, or they've preferred the truth and settled into it, then the end will come. This is the period in which people are being settled into the truth; and people are bearing witness to the truth.

Comment: [not clear. . .] that killed his daughters and sons.

Maxwell: Yes. All right. Now. That was brought up. What about them? And some have said: "Well, it looks as if God uses people all the time." And some, you know, carry that to such an extreme as to say, "People were not that important for God. He used lots of people just to prove that He was good Himself." What about all the rest of Scripture as to what people are worth to God? You think He loved those children? Well, will He resurrect them all? They went to bed that night. Or maybe they were at one of these feasts at the brothers' houses, you remember, in the story. And the wind came, and the house came tumbling down. And they all died.

How long will they suffer in the grave as they wait? They won't even know it. So they awaken the next moment of consciousness. Well, the last thing they knew, they were at a party at their brother's house. And they awaken the next moment, "Hey, where are we?"

Now, some of them may have been very good boys and girls. And they will arise in the resurrection of the saved. Those who are absolutely unteachable, and God can do nothing with them; they're rebellious; He will have diagnosed them correctly, and they will arise in the resurrection of the wicked. In Revelation, you know how that's described. Why would He resurrect these children of Job? So we can get an answer to the question. Supposing God had given them more time? They'll have more time.

I mean, we don't need to worry about the good ones. They'll arise in the resurrection of the just and will all be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. No problem there. What about those who are so rebellious that they cannot be caught up; they will not be saved? What about them? They will be in that great encampment of the wicked described in the Scriptures. And

we'll see them out there: Job's children. And they will see the New Jerusalem. They'll see Christ in His human form; they'll see the angels; they'll see their father - who may be on the wall, looking for his children that he didn't find in the first resurrection. And he looks for them.

Now, what if one of Job's children would say, "I never thought it was going to be like this; this is beautiful. God, any chance for me?" You think God wouldn't stop everything and say, "What are you doing out there? With that attitude, you should have arisen in the resurrection of the saints," you see. So I think what this will demonstrate is, more time, more light, more opportunity, would not have won Job's rebellious children. There they are, with all this evidence surrounding them, and they're still rebellious. I think this a painful thing, the resurrection of the wicked, but it will show us who have these wonderings about these moments of unfairness, perhaps. . . .

Supposing Uncle Bill had lived another twenty years, maybe he would have come across. If the Lord knows that Uncle Bill is confirmed in his rebelliousness, or would never come around no matter if he was given a million years; he will arise in the resurrection of the rebellious, and he'll see us all— see you, see me, see the Father, see the Son, see everything— and not be moved at all. And we'll say, "Well, God, I guess You were right. You resurrected Uncle Bill in the right resurrection."

So I think there'll be further confirmation right along. Do you feel satisfied with that?

Comment: Yes, thank you.

Maxwell: See, in the Flood, look at the children that died in the Flood. They'll arise in the appropriate resurrection. And you know there could be good boys and girls that died in the Flood. I think I mentioned before: I can imagine a little girl begging her Daddy to take her to the ark. And he never got her there, and she died in the Flood. Saints often die with the sinners, you know. All right, that little girl will arise in the appropriate resurrection; and all will be well.

There will be no mistake in the resurrections. No one who might be benefitted by more time because he has a willingness to listen, will turn up in the resurrection of the unwilling-to-listen. No. Because the thief on the cross shows: If you die just willing to listen, you will arise among the saints. You'll be in the Kingdom. And we can trust God, the ultimate Physician, not to make an error in His diagnosis. That's the thing.

Venden: Here's a very thoughtful question that's been typed out. It's rather lengthy, and we have about six minutes, seven minutes. Would you? I think it fits in at this point very well.

Maxwell: {Reading the question}: "Your thoughts on how the wicked are destroyed at the end of the thousand years were a delight and a shock at the same time. As all other Seventh-day Adventists that I know of, anyway, I have believed in the slow burning process."

Well, that's not the end of it, is it? Because you know, Ellen White does say some live longer in the fire. All right, if you can't put that in your model, either [you're] misreading what she said, or she didn't say the truth; or there's something wrong with the model. So we'll work on it.

"I want to believe what you are saying about the wicked destroying themselves because they can't stand Christ's glory, or presence. But what do we do with the statements in the Great Controversy, like" - Oh good! I didn't know this was coming, you see -

"Upon the wicked He shall rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone, in a horrible tempest. This shall be the portion of their cup. Fire comes down from God out of Heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat. The earth also, and the works that are therein, are burned up. The earth's surface seems one molten mass, a vast, seething lake of fire."

Of course, much of that is from Peter, and from John in Revelation. That's scripture; not Ellen White, you know.

"I would like you to go through very carefully, point by point, so that I can really understand what you are saying about all this. Then after I weigh it carefully, I can accept it or reject it."

Perfect! That's right! Oh, that's well said. Even typing it. I always feel in theology classes, that typed papers have purer theology in them than ones you can hardly read. Which is not fair. But anyway.

Whether the destruction at the end is punishment or consequence, is at the very heart of the great controversy. See, if it's punishment, and God will burn some longer than others as part of the punishment — no earthly power, however demonic, has ever done that. Because they can't keep people alive in the fire. They don't know how — we're going to see the most exquisite torture at the end. God can keep people alive in the fire.

Now, if you believe in the immortality of the soul, which is widely held, then God has some excuse here, in that the soul is immortal. So He has no problem keeping people alive in the fire; they are alive anyway. See what the immortality of the soul does. If you accept Satan's lie in the Garden of Eden, that sin does not result in death, that you will live, and live forever, then you'll either live in bliss, or you'll live somewhere else - a place of deprivation, possibly a place of great pain and torture. And of course, Dante wrote on this. And there's a book in the Apocrypha, called "The Revelation of Peter," where everyone is appropriately tortured in the fire for eternity.

And I hear it on television. I mean regularly, right now, folk who will preach one moment about the tremendous love of God and the indwelling of the Spirit. And the next minute they're saying, "If you turn this down, a million years from now you'll be writhing in the flames, and you'll be praying God that you might die. But there is no death down there." I mean, I'm doing it softly. This is common fare on television - going by satellite to millions of people in the world.

But that view is not as harsh as this one: that being mortal, fire would normally kill you very quickly. But God will keep mortal sinners alive in the fire, until they have suffered enough to satisfy your and my demands for vengeance. That precious promise will be fulfilled: "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay."

How many of us want an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. I've heard people say, "If Idi Amin does not get precisely what he deserves, I will not be satisfied; and I will not respect God's justice. But I know He'll do it. I claim His precious promise. I have wanted to take vengeance myself at times, and I've never done it, because God says, 'Leave it to Me.' And I know He'll do it more thoroughly than I could anyway. And so I'm counting on that day, when God will take vengeance on my enemies.

Now of course, I don't call it vengeance. I call it justice. Holy justice. But I'll tell you, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is still an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Vengeance is vengeance, no matter what you call it. How many of you want just vengeance on your enemies? Do you want to live next door to somebody who will be watching from the walls, and being deeply satisfied? I'd be scared to live with that one. Need another word: Being terrified of neighbors who are pleased with satisfaction of justice and vengeance.

Well then, what is the truth? The Bible uses this language. Not Ellen White. It's in the Scriptures. She put many verses together. "The very elements will melt with fervent heat." "The sulphurous flames." "The smoke of their torment ascendeth forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night." The Bible's full of that.

To do it in two minutes -- It seems to me one could go - ultimately the only way - through all Sixty-six books, and note all the references to God's glory looking like fire. And trace that all the way through. And that's very satisfying. But if one only has a brief moment, one should go to the cross. Because only once in the history of the universe, has anybody died the ultimate death of a sinner. Jesus, God in human form, died the death of the wicked, didn't He? Now, was He tortured for eternity in the fire? Did God keep Him alive in the fire so He would be punished as much as He deserved? For did He not die as we deserve, so we could be treated as He deserved? Then if we as sinners deserve to be tortured in the fire for appropriate lengths of time, and Jesus died as we deserve, it should be in the Biblical record, that He was tortured in the fire. And since He died for so many of us, He should surely still be there.

Have you checked lately? Any reports from Hell the Lord our Savior is still writhing in the flames? No! We have a great report. On Sunday morning He was gone. He was already on His way up to Heaven to see if the universe had got the message. What message? Why, the end of theophobia, that's what. If God is going to torture us to death in the end, I'm scared stiff. Even though I be forgiven, I got to live with that kind of a god. Maybe He'll lose control of His power someday, and we're all in jeopardy. No. God would never do such a thing.

Now, we have to go back and pick up the glory in the fire. We lived in this fire in the past, this glory of God that has the appearance of fire. The angels live in it. Satan lived in it, didn't he, when he was Lucifer? During the Millennium, will we not live in it? And by the way, if that fire us the glory of God, do you ever want it to go out? I hope the glory of God never goes out, or we'll go out with it. No. You see, this fire - which is the unveiled glory of God - is eternal, everlasting, and will never ever go out. But those who are out of harmony with God, will indeed be consumed. The very elements will melt with fervent heat. As He cries because He can no longer protect them.

If we're out of harmony, this life-giving glory that we've been living in for a thousand years, and hasn't hurt us a bit; it will consume all that's out of harmony. And when everything is consumed - like the stubble; like the ashes under our feet - will the fire go out? If it's a fire God has kindled to burn His enemies, then it will go out. If it's God's life-giving glory, it will never ever go out. And we will live in it for all eternity.

So I don't even mind talking about the everlasting fire burning forever and ever and ever - if it's God's life-giving glory.
Ellen White says the fire is the unveiled glory and majesty of our God. She says, "The light of

the glory of God, which brings life to the righteous, brings death to the wicked." There's nothing arbitrary about the death of the wicked. "Satan and all of his followers, have placed themselves so out of harmony with God, that His very presence becomes to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love, will consume them." And I love Ellen White's explanation. But she's the one who wrote this.

So in my model of Ellen White, say - and every one of us deserves a model. I don't like people quoting bits and pieces from me out of context. You know. It isn't fair. We should be fair to each other and get the whole picture. When you read Ellen White - these fearsome words; she's the one who also wrote these other things: "There's nothing arbitrary about it; it's the glory of God."

So we need to build a model. And you might start with the clearest statements, and then fit these in and see if they make sense. I believe there is a way of doing it that would be the end of this new word tonight, the word of the week - theophobia. I like that one. It can make you sick.

Venden: It seems to me, you've described - what you've said, is to simply first of all decide whether it's punishment of consequence.

Maxwell: That's the biggest thing.

Venden: If you've made that decision, and we've selected consequences, where we really stand; then this language just describes that consequence in very vivid terms.

Maxwell: That's right. And it needs to be vivid, because we won't take it seriously otherwise. This is she-bear language. This is Sinai language. Because He doesn't want us to be lost. You know. Well, it's like the ad on smoking. It would be best not to smoke. It's bad to smoke. It's dangerous to smoke. It's fatal to smoke. I mean, it's getting stronger and stronger, isn't it? Because who's paying attention? You see. And so it's getting stronger and stronger. And as God warns His children to get stronger and stronger; and the last message is the Third Angel's Message; and it is fearsome! Because He doesn't want anyone of us to be lost. And then it makes sense that He should use such language, it seems to me.

Venden: All right, we're at our time period— a bit over. So we'll ask you to lead us in prayer.

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven, Sabbath reminds us of how it was on this earth before the rebellion spread to this planet. And our first parents lived in the unveiled glory of our God. How beautiful, how healthy, how energetic, how free and happy they were.

But we thank Thee for veiling this life-giving glory, when our first parents sinned, and we by our own choice as the years have gone by, have shared in that sin. For we understand that were it not for Thy merciful veiling of this glorious majesty and power that surrounds Thy Person, we who are out of harmony would be consumed.

If even Thy friend Moses was told that no man can see Thy face and live, we know Thou wouldst not say anything arbitrary to Moses; it were not a restriction for arbitrary reasons. Even Moses could not see Thee in Thy glory. But we look forward to the day when all the damage will be healed - for those of us who are willing to be healed, and trust Thee enough to listen, accept Thy correction, become the kind of people Thou art eager to make us.

We know that some day we will be able to live again in this unveiled, life-giving glory of Thee, our Father. And though surely if mighty angels veil their faces in reverence before Thee and Thy power, we too will be overwhelmed with reverence, respect, and wonder and awe. And yet we'll know as the angels now know, and have known since the cross: there is no absolutely no need to be afraid of One so infinite in majesty and power.

As parents, as teachers, we understand the difficulty of winning respect without fear. Since Thou art so awesome and infinite in majesty and power, how difficult for Thee to reassure us there is no need to be afraid. And to do this, Thou hast stepped so low. Thou has become a Human Being, weak, tired and hungry. And then we assume that there was no need to be even respectful and reverent, and we went to the other extreme.

May we from our own experience in knowing how difficult it is, how delicate it is, to hold reverence and respect without terror, fear and force. Surely we should be able to read the Scriptures with sympathy and understanding, as we see Thee seeking to accomplish this ultimately delicate but very wonderful thing. Most appropriate, understanding, reverence, wonder and respect; without one single streak of fear.

May we become such people, and spread the good word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, #18

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

"God Waits For His Children To Grow Up"

Venden: Looking at our title for this evening, "God Waits For His Children To Grow Up," leads to a question that has come up before in our series: "How much longer do you think God is going to wait?"

AGM: I think that subject is so important that it's the subject for next time: "How Soon Will The Conflict Be Over." So next Friday night.

Venden: Well, I can imagine there are a great many of us who will be anxious to hear you comment on that. Now the idea of waiting also raises the question: How is He waiting? In uncertainty? Does this say something about God wondering Himself? 'Well, I wonder how much longer it's going to be.' What about God's knowledge about the future?"

AGM: My personal preference is not to limit His knowledge past, present or future in any way. I believe He knows precisely when He is coming, but He speaks of waiting, and in many places He speaks of delay--There is much of that in Scripture. We'll have the text next time.--in order to indicate to us what is most important to Him and that He will not come until the conditions are right. I think that's why it's put that way. It's not to suggest that He's ignorant of these matters.

Venden: There's another question in the whole idea of growing up that comes to mind: "Here in our congregation we're all at different ages and different stages of growth. In the church, in the family of God, won't there always be babes in the truth and ones that need to grow up, new converts, shall we say, maybe not chronologically, but experientially?"

AGM: People * is very concerned about.

Venden: All right. How could it ever happen that everybody will come to the precise point, ah, everyone is grown up right now? What are you saying with this, God waiting for. . . ?

AGM: That's why earlier on we spent time on perfection. We put perfection clear out of sight and made it almost unattainable, whereas perfection is growing up, God healing the damage done. Everything depends on what it means to be grown up. One does not have to be ninety to be grown up, or fifty or thirty. I'm impressed with the maturity of Jesus at twelve in these matters. He was so settled into the truth, that when He talked with those theologians of the day, He understood it better than they did. I think we've suggested it takes too long to be settled into the truth, because perhaps we've made the truth too complicated. I think we will be amazed at how youthful people will be, how recently won to this truth, who are immovably committed to it. The truth that God is like this and not as His enemies have made Him out to be. So I think an understanding of what it means to be grown up and settled into the truth would make this much more attainable at the end.

Venden: I hear you suggesting something at the very center, something simple and yet profoundly important.

AGM: Both of those things, just the way you said it, has to be spoke. The simplest statement is

about the most sublime truth that holds the universe together.

Venden: I am struck by a bit of incongruity, it would seem, in the Scripture. On the one hand, you are talking about us growing up, and then if you turn to the words of Jesus, over and over again He said we should be as little children. Well, if we're not as little children, we can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. What do you do with those references, for instance, in Luke and in Matthew where He talked about being as little children and seemed to set up a very high priority on that? And you're saying, "Why don't you grow up?"

AGM: Well, when you putting it especially in the setting of the audience around and how they were misbehaving and He takes a little child and says, "Unless you're at least like this, you'll not see the Kingdom." I don't think we should ever lose that. The trust of a little child. The curiosity, the willingness to listen, the willingness to learn. You remember the Laodiceans aren't willing to listen to anything, though they're grown up, it would appear. I think that is never to be lost. But Ephesians also says that while we should never lose those precious qualities of childish interest and curiosity and willingness to listen, we should not remain as children requiring much protection. We should become adults who can stand on their own. I think it's marvelous to see somebody in his seventies, eighties, nineties who still has the curiosity, interest and trust of a little child.

Venden: So you say he's talking about certain qualities.

AGM: Oh, yes. We could think of some, couldn't we?

Venden: That does lead to another question: "Is it possible, since you put such importance, on the basis of Scripture, on growing up, is it possible for a person to tell that he or she is in fact growing up?"

AGM: Well, since we've used I Corinthians 13 on the list, it would be appropriate to note that in the chapter where he says, "I once thought like a child, but now I've given up childish ways," that all the rest of the chapter is on how a grown-up behaves. That is, he loves. That is, love is never rude, never impatient, never arrogant, never boasts - look how little children boast - never insists on having its own way. Am I beginning to behave like a grownup? I Corinthians 13, the love chapter, describes how a grownup behaves. I think there's an additional thing too. Why am I behaving like this? Am I doing it because somebody in authority has told me to and He has power to reward and destroy? Or am I sold on the message of I Corinthians 13? I love how Jesus behaved that way. I'd like to be like Him. I just agree with Him. He doesn't have to tell me anymore not to murder my mother-in-law. I don't like the idea myself, you see. So eventually we do what is right because it is right. That's all part of growing up.

Venden: You are saying, then, that there is a certain legitimacy in evaluating the way we act, the way we feel about other people, for example.

AGM: I think if we see no progress over the past year, we should be concerned.

Venden: Well, I was thinking about how my dad used to put marks on the wall. Did your dad do that?

AGM: Oh yes. Had them all over there, the laundry wall.

Venden: And we were always--I was interested in whether I was growing more than Morrie. Morrie finally went up, surpassed me.

AGM: I lost to my younger brother.

Venden: But there's a certain danger in focusing on our growth to where my whole concern is how am I doing? and I get my eyes off of. . .

AGM: That's why we need to go back to our earlier Conversations. God can completely heal the damage done. I mean, how does one grow up?

Venden: You don't grow by trying to grow.

AGM: We grow up into His likeness. If I'm not thinking about Him. . .

Venden: How can you grow if you're looking at yourself a bit and hoping to grow, how can you avoid the self confidence that comes in, for instance, with teh Laodiceans who feel very content? I suppose if you'd ask a Laodicean, he'd say, "Well, I've really done quite well. I'm growing very nicely, thank you."

AGM: Well, one of the evidences that one is growing up is that one is not becoming arrogant. You know, there's nothing more stubborn than a little child. "My Daddy says it, and he's bigger than your Daddy, and therefore it's true." I would say it would be a mark of immaturity for a person of advanced years to be so self-satisfied and so arrogantly stubborn about his opinions. That suggests one is still a child. So really, one grows up. One even enhances this quality of a child, the humility, willingness to listen, to accept correction, to accept instruction. That should become even greater as one gets older. So an arrogant, "I think I've almost made it now," suggests one may not have even started.

Venden: There are many references in our Bible Reference Sheet referring to sealing, being sealed. Will we know if and when we have been sealed?

AGM: Well, if we understand we are sealed by the Spirit, we look for the fruits of the Spirit. For example, a great concern for truth. Also, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And love does not behave itself unseemly. I mean, all those things enter into that. I would say that if more and more I am perceiving the truth, the all-important truth, and I'm liking it more and more, I'm coming to the place where I'd stake my life on this conviction about God, then I realize the Spirit is having His way. However, I must take those convictions back to Scripture where I got them in the first place, continually submit them to correction of the Scriptures inspired by the Spirit. So I think that as one perceives that one is being more settled into this great picture of our God, not just as an opinion but one would even stake his life on it, and it really is affecting the way one looks at other people and behaves, then one could say, "God, I thank You for the Spirit. He's evidently having some success with me."

Venden: Now when you talk about the seal of God, that leads to another phrase that you commented on, I think, the past two Friday evenings and promised us more a little later. What really is the mark of the beast?

AGM: Well the sealing is mentioned first in Revelation, then the mark of the beast. And I think the mark of the beast, really a symbol of loyalty to the opposition, should be compared with the symbol of loyalty to God. I believe that to receive the seal of God is to be so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually that one cannot be moved. I believe that to receive the "mark of the beast" is to be so settled into the lie, and there are Scriptures that talk about the Lie, preferring Satan's lies to the truth - you've substituted his lies for the truth; I believe to receive the mark of the beast is to be so settled into Satan's false picture of God that not even the Spirit of God could move us. We cannot be moved. So in essence, the seal or the mark represents an inner decision and commitment for eternity with respect to God.

Venden: Well, are you suggesting then that the seal of God - and for those of us who have roots in Seventh-day Adventism, for example, the seal of God has been tied very closely to the Sabbath.

AGM: All my life.

Venden: In fact, I thought we had referred to the Sabbath as the seal of God in itself. But I hear you making a distinction there.

AGM: Well, one has to stop and realize that the people who crucified Christ kept the Seventh-day Sabbath scrupulously, very very carefully. Did they have the seal of God? They certainly were not settled into the truth about God. When Jesus brought the truth about God, they said He had a devil, and they killed Him to silence His witness. On the other hand though, you remember the evening we talked about how the Sabbath sums up the good news about our God, I believe that knowing meaningful, intelligent, thoughtful observers of the Seventh Day as a reminder of all these great demonstrations of the truth about our God, could be an outward expression of an inward conviction and a settling into this truth about our God. The Seventh-day Sabbath beautifully fits this mark of identification of those who are committed to the truth about God.

Venden: So it has something to do with very deep understanding and experience.

AGM: Yes. That's why you can see, when the chips are down, I mean, when the issues in the great controversy are clearly seen, it's conceivable that the preference for a substitute Sabbath could suggest preference for, even faith in the substitute for the Son of God, the one who said, "I will be like the Most High." The one who said to Christ, "Worship me." But not until then.

Venden: All right. Now, there's this very interesting passage on the front of our Bible Reference Sheet which talks about things taught by demons and with reference to forbidding to marry. You commented on that, and some things to do with food. On that marrying thing, didn't Paul even go so far to say that we shouldn't marry, and isn't he the one who wrote I Timothy too?

AGM: Well, using the Bible the way I'm sure the devil would love to have us use it--here a little and there a little, and each denomination has its own collection of "littles," and we think we have the best one--you can prove anything you like from the Bible. But if you take Paul's comments on marriage in the full setting in Corinthians, he has nothing against marriage whatsoever. In fact, at weddings, whose writings do we quote more than the writings of Paul? He said the nicest things about marriage. So one needs to re-read in I Corinthians the description of the emergency. His advice about marriage was an emergency measure at that particular time. So

it's not fair to Paul or to the meaning of marriage to pluck that little verse out of its setting.

Venden: This reference to food though makes me wonder. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a message about food and health and so forth. Could this possibly be a *?

AGM: Well, it's sometimes used for us. We have some things to say about food. In fact, everybody's talking about food these days.

Venden: That's true.

AGM: Not unusual. Well, we don't say people shouldn't marry for ceremonial reasons, nor do we say they shouldn't eat certain foods for ceremonial reasons. But through the centuries there have been religious organizations that have said for ceremonial religious reasons you shouldn't marry, for ceremonial religious reasons you shouldn't eat certain foods. That's all it's talking about.

Venden: You are saying it's quite different when you emphasize concern about food for health reasons.

AGM: You don't just *

Venden: For ceremonial reasons.

AGM: That's right. You see, those ceremonial restrictions put God in an arbitrary light.

Venden: I gather that Job is a favorite character of yours.

AGM: Yes.

Venden: You refer to him so frequently. And yet the question comes up: Why would you use Job as a model, since at the end of the book he talks about repenting?

AGM: That's right.

Venden: And repenting sounds like somebody who has been wronged and is saying, "I'm sorry. I'm a sinner." How could Job be a good model when he is repenting?

AGM: A lot of folk I think misunderstand Job by closing with that statement. Job says, "I repent." And they say, "The friends were right; they said he should repent." See, many people read Job and side with the friends. Those who take, if I may say, the narrow, easy view are more comfortable with the friends. But they fail to read on. After Job says, "I repent," God says, "Don't. You have done a beautiful job. You have said of Me what is right and those theologians have not." So then I go back and ask, "Why did Job say 'I repent'?" "God," he says, "I have spoken of many things beyond my understanding. I, I wouldn't say it the same way next time." God says, "Look, We're sympathetic up here. You've lost your family, lost your estate, lost your reputation and are sitting on dung heap with your clothes torn and covered with boils. We didn't expect eloquent speeches from you. We think under the circumstances you did magnificently, Job! We couldn't be more proud of you. You have said of Me what is right." But Job says,-- wouldn't you say at the end of the best sermon you ever preached, "I'm sorry I didn't do a better

job?" I would.

Venden: Yes.

AGM: Well, I think that's all Job said. "I wish I had done a better job."

Venden: Someone said the other day that there is actually in the medical dictionary a medical term "theophobia," fear of God.

AGM: That's right. Theophobia.

Venden: An actual ailment that a physician might need to be alert to.

AGM: That's right. The doctors have to work with it. A morbid fear of the wrath of God. And so a saint has just come in and preached, "Fear God," and the doctors have to rush in to cure the Theophobia. We better tell him the truth, or we ministers are working at odds with our clinical friends if we are making patients ill with Theophobia. We better bring the good news that there is no need to be afraid of God.

Venden: It would be tragic to think about God, the one who maybe passed out here to become a Theophobic experience.

AGM: Jesus spent all His life healing the sick.

Venden: In Ephesians 4, which is another reference in our Bible Reference Sheet, it suggests that the work of the church is to help people grow up. How does a church try to do that? How could our University Church here at Loma Linda really help people to grow?

AGM: As pastor, you've devoted your life to thinking of ways to do this. What's the best way to say this? I really think it's to recognize that it would be growing up for one to go from the more legal, authoritarian view that's more appropriate for a little child to this to this larger understanding of freedom and truth, and that God does not ask us to believe anything for which He does not provide evidence. It is evidence that appeals to the reason. He urges us to inquire, to investigate. These are the things that a grown-up does. And I think we have to lead people, it's the greatest service we can perform, to take trusting children and make independent but loving, trusting adults out of them who can withstand what's coming. I think one of the first ways is to invite our members to inquire, investigate. Every sermon that you hear, go home and investigate. And then they'll grow up.

Venden: You know, as we came toward the close of our meeting last Friday night, you were suggesting some ways in which the enemy has distorted and perverted Bible truths and made it a way in which God is pictured unfairly, wrongly. A terrible picture of God. I'd like to turn that around tonight and have you suggest how a light understanding of some of the things we talked about last week - A Christian doctor can help people to grow up. For example, what about faith, a correct understanding of faith?

AGM: See, the devil, as we mentioned last time, would love to have saints still understanding faith to mean believing what someone in authority tells you, that it's a leap in the dark, it's just believing. Because then he'll have a free way with us. The truth isn't on his side. What he

needs is our willingness to believe without investigation. And we need to tell people that faith means trust, a well-founded trust, not even based on God's claims but on God's demonstration of the truth.

Venden: What about the Holy Spirit?

AGM: The same way there. I think the devil has perverted that, that the Holy Spirit is a shortcut. You don't need the truth, you just need the Spirit. And when you have this indwelling, this feeling that comes up through your body, and unfortunately, it is often described as starting with the feet and ending with the head. If it would only go down the other way, it might filter out some things on the way! And that if the Holy Spirit comes, He will take over, and He will take charge, and God will run you. It sounds so good. It's a devilish perversion. The Bible says, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide you into truth." He will help you investigate, and He'll give you the gift of self-control. So all these doctrines can be used both ways. We've got to present the Spirit as bringing independence, teaching us self-control, things like that.

Venden: What about some of these things you referred to as emergency measures - the Law? You spoke about the Law this evening. Now, are you saying that the Law can be distorted? Is there a place for the Law in a healthy, balanced view?

AGM: Yes, if we present the larger view, we show how God added these emergency measures when we needed them. Faith does not deny them, but thanks God for them. But the Law was given to lead us to Christ that we may grow up. If we present every one of these doctrines in the larger view and thank God for them but not understand them, misunderstood they either keep us as children, and hence vulnerable to Satan's influences in the end.

Venden: I want to press on with some of the others, so you only have time for kind of a thumbnail comment, but the destruction of the wicked.

AGM: Again, if that produces Theophobia, then there will come the obedience that springs from fear which turns us into rebels and certainly keeps us children. God says, "Love Me, or I'll kill you." It won't even produce real love, let alone the love of a little child. Take the cross. Again, if the cross is seen as propitiating the anger, winning the favor of this offended God, again it produces Theophobia. The cross can even make me afraid of God. I'm glad He's forgiven me just now, but I better not give up, or you know what He'll do to me.

Venden: What's the healthier view of the cross then?

AGM: Ah, that on the cross Jesus demonstrated that sin does indeed lead to death; it's that serious. But it is not torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God. He simply gave up His Son as He will give us up in the end. And the Son died and the Father cried, as He will cry over us when we die in the end, forbid that we shall. There is no need to be afraid of God when we stand at the foot of the cross.

Venden: Take a definition of sin, or the understanding of sin in this whole thing.

AGM: I believe it could breathe arbitrariness. It could suggest sin is something that God doesn't like. It offends Him. It makes Him angry, instead of sin being something that's really wrong. Sin is like poison, and so the punishment for sin is really not punishment. That's a

childish view. Sin leads to consequence, even to the consequence of death, and God would spare us.

Venden: The Atonement.

AGM: Again, if atonement is seen as reconciling God to us, propitiating Him. You know, reconciling Him to us, assuaging His wrath now instead of God winning us back to Him. He never left us; we left Him.

Venden: Let's take two more. Intercession.

AGM: Again, if that suggests that the Father is not our Friend but the Son, the kind One, is pleading with Him, we've driven a wedge between the Father and the Son, and we've made the Father very unforgiving and severe. But think of it. The intercession message could be used by the devil to turn us against God and keep us as little children.

Venden: What about the Judgment?

AGM: Ah, again as that is seen to be arbitrary, or the suggestion that, "Well, don't worry, we have a Friend up there, and that Friend is the Son," I think that's cruel. I think the devil is pleased when we think of one Member of the Godhead as more friendly than the other Two.

Venden: Well, now we've just tried to review eighteen weeks of all the Conversations. Eighteen weeks in the last three minutes here.

AGM: And it's risky to be so brief. I hope folk will look over this.

Venden: But I hope perhaps the appetite has been whetted. I want to mention again--we did this a couple weeks ago--I want to mention again our little book Can God Be Trusted? which you authored some years ago which I think provides a very nice review of our series, and those who are listening or watching, we'd like to invite them to write to: The University Church, Loma Linda, CA 92354, and we'll try to see that they get a copy. To those who have already written, be patient. We're at work.

AGM: They're on their way.

Venden: They're on their way. That's right. Now, we're coming up to Number Nineteen.

AGM: Nineteen.

Venden: Next Friday night what's our topic?

AGM: "How Soon Will The Conflict Be Over?"

Venden: "How Soon?" That raises the question of time, doesn't it?

AGM: That's right.

Venden: And certainly for God's people ever since John said, "Come soon, Lord Jesus," that's

been a part of His children's thinking*/statement.

AGM: That's right. All the time, Old Testament too.

Venden: All right, so we're going to talk about "How Soon?" next Friday evening, Number Nineteen in our series Conversations About God.