

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER TWENTY *AT PEACE WITH OUR HEAVENLY FATHER*

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Number Twenty: "**At Peace with Our Heavenly Father**"--another look at God's successful, but very costly resolution of the crisis in His family.

We began these Conversations by remembering that there once was peace throughout the universe. And there was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other, all of them trusted their Heavenly Father, and He, in turn, could safely trust them. But we have also talked about the war that began up in Heaven, the conflict of distrust, the false charges of the adversary, and God's patient demonstration of the truth. The conflict was not over mere obedience to the rules but over the character and government of God Himself. Victory for God is not the destruction of His enemies. This He could have accomplished by the merest command or manifestation of almighty power. But God's enemies are His own beloved, but misbehaving children. There is no victory for God until what went wrong has been set right, till peace has been eternally secured--not a false peace based on force or fear, but real peace based on freely given love and trust.

There could be no peace if God were as Satan has made Him out to be--arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. Mere pardon and adjustment of one's legal standing would not produce peace between sinners and this kind of God. Yet there are explanations of salvation that seem based on the assumption that Satan's accusations are truth. "God is arbitrary," some will say, "but as Sovereign He has the right to be." "God takes vengeance, but for Him we should call it justice." Few would suggest that God is unforgiving and severe, but many imply the same by urging the necessity of a Friend up there to plead with God to forgive and heal.

Paul told early Christians that since we have been won back to trust, and so set right with God, we should go on enjoying the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1) Jesus came to bring peace with God, not by paying some legal penalty so God would not have to kill us after all. He brought peace by showing us the truth about our God, that there is no need to be afraid. God will indeed give up those who refuse to trust and listen and let Him heal. But God will not torture to death his dying children. Jesus brought peace, not so much by assuring us that He would be our Friend in court but by showing that there is no need for Him to plead with God in our behalf, for the Father is just as much our Friend.

Truly, the only way to set and keep us right was for Jesus to come and demonstrate the truth about the Father. And so, as one of God's best friends has said, "The whole purpose of Christ's mission on this earth was to set men right by revealing the truth about God's character." **This** is the truth that sets us free. **This** is the truth that brings everlasting peace. But do we like it? Do we want it? Like God, would we give up anything to have such peace?

Welcome to the twentieth and the last of our Conversations about God--another look at our Heavenly Father in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government. The topic for our conversation this time is, "**At Peace With Our Heavenly Father**"--God's successful, but very costly resolution of the conflict in His family. We began this

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series by remembering that there once was peace throughout the universe. There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other and all of them trusted their Heavenly Father. And He, in turn, could safely trust in them. But we also have talked about the war that began up in heaven, the conflict of distrust, the false charges of the adversary, and God's long and patient demonstration of the truth. This conflict has not been over mere obedience to the rules, but over the very character and government of God Himself. So victory for God is not the destruction of His enemies. That kind of victory He could have accomplished very easily by the merest command or exhibition of almighty power. But the sad part is that God's enemies have been His own beloved and misbehaving children. What victory would it have been for God to destroy them even if He could have easily done it?

There will be no victory for God unless what went wrong has been set right, and peace in His family has been made eternally secure--not a false peace, based on force or fear, but real peace based on freely given love and trust. What else could He find satisfactory from His children? Now there could certainly be no peace if God should be the kind of person Satan has made him out to be--arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. And yet there are explanations of the plan of salvation that seem to be based on the assumption that Satan's false picture of God is the truth.

For example, "God is arbitrary", some will say, "but as Sovereign He has the right to be." "God does take vengeance", others will say, "but for Him we should call it justice." Perhaps few would dare say that God is unforgiving and severe. Yet they imply the same by urging the necessity of a Friend up there to plead with God to forgive and heal.

You see, mere pardon, mere adjustment of our legal standing with that kind of a God, would hardly bring peace between Him and sinners. Peace with that kind of a God--arbitrary, vengeful, and severe--who under special circumstances may have chosen to forgive, would be little more than a cease-fire--a temporary truce.

But Paul explained to early Christians that sinners can be restored to genuine peace with God. Look at Romans 5:1 (*RSV*). "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is a well known verse. The wording is similar to that of the *King James Version* and other versions through the years. But perhaps your version doesn't say, "We have peace." Does yours say, "Let us have peace", as if we have justification first and then we seek for peace afterwards as an additional blessing? Or does justification in and of itself bring peace?

One of the first English Bibles to translate, "let us have peace", was the *Rheims-Douay Version* of 1582. "Let us have peace", rather than "We have peace". Many other versions have agreed. The best known is the *English Revised Version* of 1881, and what a furor that translation stirred up among the scholars! They thought that was very bad exegesis. When we are justified we "have peace," not "let us have peace." Actually the whole squabble is much ado about nothing. Almost literally nothing, because it is an argument about the letter "o", sometimes used for zero. You see, the word "we have" is pronounced in the Greek **echomen**. "Let us have" is **echoomen**. The difference is the letter "o". If it is short "o", it means "we have". If it is the long

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"o", it means "let us have". (By the way, the short "o" is pronounced Omicron and the long "o" is pronounced Omega.)

The best manuscripts agree that it should be that long "o"--"let us have peace". Does that mean that justification of itself doesn't bring peace? Oh, it doesn't imply that at all. If we prefer (and I would) the "let us have", it can be translated, "let us go on having peace". Justification brings it. Let's go on having it.

Look at *Moffatt*. He translated years ago, "Let us enjoy the peace we have." Mrs. Helen Barrot Montgomery (I love to quote the lady translators when I can) renders it, "Let us continue to enjoy the peace we have." I wish I had had room for *Phillips'* rendering of this verse. He translates it, "Let us grasp the fact that we have peace." That really combines the two, doesn't it? For justification does indeed bring peace, which indicates that justification must be more than mere pardon and the adjustment of our legal standing.

Have you ever wronged someone, then been very generously forgiven, and ever after been embarrassed to meet that person again? Does God want us to avoid Him in the hereafter because He has been so forgiving and we would be uncomfortable in His presence, in fear that perhaps He might bring up the subject of our sinful past? Mere pardon is no guarantee that He won't do that. So God not only forgives, He also treats us as if we had never sinned. More than that, He even treats us as if we had always been His loyal children.

How do we know that to be true? Is that based on a promise? Remember, a promise is only a claim. Is there evidence and demonstration in Scripture that God not only forgives us, but that He will treat us as if we have always been His loyal children? Look how God spoke to Solomon about his father, David. 1 Kings 9:3,4 (NIV). "The Lord said to him (Solomon)...`If you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did...'" Integrity of heart? Uprightness? Think of all the things that David did! And yet, because David had been set right with God and had been won back to trust and had received a new heart and a right spirit, God describes sinful David as if he had always been His loyal son. He did it to David. He is willing to do it to every one of us.

Now, that is the meaning of the experience of justification. And since that Latin term, "justification", has come to have such a narrow, legal connotation in theological circles, I suggest we offer a substitution, another term such as, "set right", or "put right" with our God.

But Jesus didn't come to bring peace with our God just by paying some legal penalty so God would not have to kill us after all. Jesus brought peace with God by showing the truth about our God--that there is no need to be afraid. God will indeed give up those who refuse to trust Him, who turn down the truth, who are unwilling to listen and let Him save and heal them. They **will** die--not as a penalty, but as a consequence. God absolutely will **not** torture to death His dying children. Guess where that idea came from!

Jesus also brought peace--not by assuring us that He would be our Friend in court, but rather, by showing us that there is no need for Him to plead with the Father in our behalf, for the

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Father is just as much our Friend. (John 16:26) So, truly, the only way to set us right and keep us right and restore us back to peace with God, was for Jesus to come and demonstrate, at great cost, the truth about His Father.

As one of God's best friends has written, "The whole purpose of Christ's mission on this earth was to set men right by revealing the truth about God's character." (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, Jan. 20, 1890) This is the great truth that sets us free. This is the truth that brings everlasting peace throughout the universe.

Now we know what it cost to demonstrate this truth. You recall Conversation Number Eight, "**The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence**"--the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. You remember Colossians 1:20 (*NEB*), "Through Him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to Himself, making peace through the shedding of His blood upon the cross." Christ died for the whole universe, even for loyal angels, to answer their questions.

How successful would you say God has been in restoring peace to His universe? How about up in heaven? Does peace prevail? Read the whole book of Revelation. They never cease to celebrate God's victory in the great controversy and to tell how trustworthy and righteous He is. How about peace in the hereafter? Read Isaiah and the last two chapters in Revelation and passages from many of the other prophetic books, those marvelous descriptions of the peace to come.

How successful has God been in restoring peace on this earth? Because so many have perversely chosen to twist or even reject the truth, instead of producing peace, it has produced argument, debate; even to the point of violence and persecution. Jesus warned of this. Look at His words in Matthew 10:34-36 (*GNB*). (He foresaw what His demonstration of the truth would cause.) "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; a man's worst enemies will be the members of his own family."

Look at what the members of Jesus' own family did to Him. John 1:11 (*Goodspeed*). "He came to His home and His own family did not welcome Him." In fact, they told Him He had a devil, to be so describing His Father. They killed Him to silence Him. We need to remember as we have mentioned several times in these conversations, that the ones who rejected Christ and preferred Satan's picture of God, were the most pious group of Seventh-day-Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible- studying adventists the world has ever known.

Peter warns that those who accept the true picture of God may expect similar treatment and even suffer somewhat as Christ did. Look at 1 Peter 4:12-14 (*GNB*). "Do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering...Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings...Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ's followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you." Where will such trouble come from, for those who hold the true picture of God? Could such trouble come again from the same sort of pious, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-quoting, adventists as before? Could one entertain such a thought? Remember it happened once before.

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But now if the Holy Spirit is with these people He will bring peace, Paul says in Galatians 5:22 (Weymouth), "The Spirit, on the other hand, brings a harvest of love, joy, peace..." But how does the Holy Spirit bring peace? Does He bring peace by working on our feelings, like a Divine tranquilizer? Or does the Holy Spirit bring peace by reminding us of the truth? Look at Jesus' explanation in John 14:25,26 (NIV). Who would know better than He? "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Then He went on giving the reasons why, until He came to what is said in John 16:33; and 17:1,3,4 (Jerusalem). "I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave, I have conquered the world.' (That is, We have won Our case in the great controversy. Then He turned and said to His Father,) `Father...eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God...I have glorified You on earth and finished the work that You gave Me to do.'" His work was to reveal the truth about His Father's character. To show that He is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. This is the costly truth and evidence that is the basis of our freedom to make up our minds about God.

But now, is it possible to be convinced and accept this truth and be willing to give up anything to have this peace and yet still experience some very unpeaceful strugglings within ourselves? This troubles many. It troubled Paul and he confesses it in Romans 7, the whole chapter. Look particularly at Romans 7:23,24 (GNB). After he said, "all the good that I would do, I don't do" (you remember the struggle in that whole chapter) "I see a different law at work in my body--a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of...It makes me a prisoner...What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me?"

Then you know that all of chapter 8, describes the rescue. The chapter begins by Paul saying that God does not condemn His struggling children. He is not only our Father, but our Divine Physician, and He knows that the habits of a lifetime are not cured overnight. And so, as we struggle, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all on our side to help us and to heal us. Look at the marvelous summary at the end of Romans 8, verses 31, 38 and 39 (GNB). "If God is for us, who can be against us? ...I am certain that ...neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers ...will ever be able to separate us from the love of God."

In fact, if we need discipline to overcome bad habits and learn new ones, God will give it to us. But when the discipline comes, we will understand that He is not angry with us. He is disciplining us because He loves us. We will not allow the discipline to disturb our peace with God. Look at Hebrews 12:11 (NIV). "No discipline seems pleasant at the time ...Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace." That whole section is on how God disciplines whom He loves as a father disciplines his son. Note that discipline seems unpleasant at the time, but later, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. In fact, if we have been set right with our God and we have been won back to love and trust, God can even turn our trials and troubles to our advantage. Go back to the passage with which we began our conversation this evening, Romans 5. Look at verses 3 and 4 (*Phillips*). "We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character..." (*Phillips*) You know how that passage goes on. A

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mature character produces a hope that will never let us down. That makes for great peace between us and our God.

To some of us this picture of God we have been conversing about these last several weeks is very good news. But it is far from new news. It was presented centuries ago throughout the 66 books of Scripture. Even before all of them were written, even in Old Testament times. Look at Isaiah 26:3,4 (*GNB*). This is a magnificent summary from the Old Testament. "You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you." You see how old that is--dating back to the days of Isaiah--and many other Old Testament prophets agreed with him. If only we could trust our God, we would have this perfect peace.

Look at Hebrews 4:2 (*GNB*) to show how long this good news has been presented through the centuries. "For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith." The Good News can be turned down. God's people of old, even His chosen people in the promised land, who were so privileged, and to whom the prophets came one after another, pleading with them so persistently, were not won by the evidence back to trust. They did not find this peace, what Hebrews called the "Sabbath-like rest", which is still available to us if we respond to this evidence and are won back to trust.

This message, this picture of God, will do us no good either if it does not win us back to trust and a willingness to listen to our God. So, could I ask you, at the end of our twenty conversations, what position have you taken in the great controversy about our God? Can you agree that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be? Do you believe that He is indeed an infinitely powerful, but an equally gracious Person, who values nothing higher than our freedom and our peace with Him and with each other? Such things are not produced by force or fear and so, instead, God pleads with us very gently, but very urgently in the words of Paul, "Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Rom. 14:5) I hope that is true of all of us.

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Conversations About God - Tape 20B

Venden: There is a very important matter that I want to take up with you, regarding spelling.

Maxwell: Oh, OK. You must hear this.

Venden: If you looked at the card carefully, you saw that we were offering a "memento." All right. So when Dr. Maxwell saw this card, he looked at it, and he said very tactfully, "I think that's memento." Like "memo," m-e-m see. And I'll have to confess, this is my typing; and that's my spelling of the word: "memento."

Maxwell: But not the end of the story, though.

Venden: And I asked my secretary, and she said, "I would have spelled it that way," which was very encouraging to me. You know, she would have spelled it m-o. And so then we got out the dictionary. And to our great delight, this is an acceptable variant.

Maxwell: And that's not handwritten in the margin, either, by the way.

[Laughter]

Venden: No! It's printed! It's printed there. And then I went home— but this dictionary is somewhat ancient vintage; so I went home, and we - Marge and I - just got a new Ninth College, the Meriam Webster, which is very authoritative. And lo and behold, it listed it as an acceptable variant. So I want you to know that that's OK. What it means, of course, in the dictionary including it, is that enough people have spelled it wrong, that they finally had to include it!

[Laughter]

Maxwell: That's probably the truth, isn't it!

Venden: I think that we ought to give a hand of applause to all the cookie makers, and the cookie servers, and punch servers. Don't you? [Applause.] And I'm sure that you've noticed that they have not gone to Price Club and bought great bulk shipments of cookies, that they've set out over there. They've been homemade. In fact, once I volunteered in a moment of stress. I said, "Well, now, you know, I could buy some." And it just was the wrong thing to have said! They didn't want to give that kind of thing away [sic]; and I honor them for that. Well, we do thank them.

Comment: How about a hand for the speakers?

Maxwell: Oh.

Venden: All right; let's do that. [Applause.] I'm glad that we're kind of tapering off, rather than coming to a -- we can be together next Friday night.

Maxwell: Right.

Venden: Now, let's go to some -- we have a few questions here that I think we ought to pick up on. So lets— I'll get my glasses on; the light is not quite so good here. Again, and I -- if we could

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nail this one thing down this evening clearly, to where the questions were pretty well put to rest, it would be a marvelous accomplishment. But "I believe now, that God isn't the One who destroys people; but He sadly gives them up, as demonstrated by the cross."

OK, that's progress. Right.

"My question is, why aren't these people suddenly destroyed by God's glory as they were during His first coming?" I'm not sure what that means.

Maxwell: "Destroyed by the brightness of His coming," one of the translations of Thessalonians.

Venden: But that's His Second Coming, isn't it?

Maxwell: I think they probably meant that that's. . .

Venden: Oh, OK. All right. "For whose benefit is it, that some take longer to die than others? Are we supposed to learn something by watching this drawn-out death scene? You've pictured it so powerfully with us -- I say us -- by God's grace, all of us on the walls. Is there something to learn from this scene, that we didn't at Christ's death?"

That's a very good question.

Maxwell: Oh, it's very well phrased. Now, this is not assuming an eternally burning Hell there, but that some will burn longer than others. Now, the only evidence for that in Scripture is in the parable of the talents, that some deserve more punishment than others; or some more stripes than others. And of course, Ellen White has endorsed that, that some live longer in the life-giving glory of God than others.

Why wouldn't God immediately put them to death? I think if God was doing it, He would. I think He'd practice euthanasia. In fact, He'd maybe rather not resurrect them at all. But He's still saying something. And first, when He resurrects the wicked, we see what we discussed in the other room. We do see confirmation of His diagnosis. More time, more evidence, does no good. They gather together to assault the New Jerusalem, under the devil's deceptive leadership again.

But then the life-giving glory of God consumes; and some live longer in that life-giving glory than others. I maintain that if God were doing this as an act of destruction; on the one hand it would be torture to do it, because they're not going to learn a thing. They're going to be dead in the end. To cause pain as one puts a person to death - that's what torture is all about. And God will not torture to death His dying children. They will die as a natural consequence of His giving them up, and ceasing to protect them from His life-giving glory, which He has all these years since Adam and Eve first sinned, but has made this earth a dark place.

Now, who learns from this? It's not a time for learning; we already know. I mean, what would we learn from this, that was not demonstrated at the cross? That's why the death of the wicked at the end is a total waste. A total waste. The evidence is already there from Gethsemane and the cross. We should need no more. It will, however, bring confirmation. And the only thing we need to be sure of, is how God is involved in that death. He's not torturing His rebellious children to death. He is simply giving them up.

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Doesn't it say, though, He's pouring out His wrath? That's right. But what is His wrath? Over and over, His wrath is His giving people up. And how does He feel when He gives people up? Read Hosea 11. He cries, "How can I? How can I let you go?" And we put all of those together.

If that is not natural consequence in the end, then we have to revise our whole picture of God. This is why some, I think, are happy that vengeance is His. There are some folk who might like to cremate their enemies. But there's a limitation there. Burning is a quick way to kill people. And that wouldn't be good enough. So some are counting on the Lord, who knows how to keep people in the fire, until they've been duly tortured. It's a fiendish view.

God will watch His children die. Some will live longer than others. The one who lives the longest appears to be Lucifer, the one who lived in that life-giving glory; who knows how long? Back in eternity. He lived in it. He walked among the stones of fire, it says. Remember in Ezekiel, and the picture in Isaiah? He's been there, a covering angel. The mightiest of all the angels, he lives the longest in the life-giving glory of God. But eventually he too is consumed.

The one maybe who wrote the question out: would that seem adequate? Would that seem clear enough? Yes.

Comment: I'd like to make a comment. I would think that if you have a lot of rubbish, it takes longer to burn it up, than if you have a small amount. It seems to me that the more sins we have . . .

Maxwell: Well, it seems to depend on the model you've taken. I think I must have at least a dozen models, and they all contribute something. Some say: Well, it would seem that the more wicked you are, the more serious would be the short circuit, and you'd die more quickly. Depends if you have electricity or flame. There isn't a model given to us.

See, God does not want us to understand the physics and the chemistry and the nuclear physics of that final, awful conflagration. Or we might begin right now to determine how much time our enemies should spend in that flame. He says, "Just trust Me. Have I made it clear to you how I am involved?" And we say, "Well, God, we have Your words. What about a demonstration?" Has anybody in the history of the universe, died the death of a sinner?

The Son of God was made to be sin, though He knew no sin. He was given up as God will give up sinners at the end, crying, "Why have You given Me up?" And He died. How was God involved? He was there. But He gave Him up as if the Son rebelliously was rejecting His Father. Which, of course, He didn't. But He was treated as God will treat real rebels in the end, to answer the question: How is God involved? He never touched His Son, but His Son died.

So all we need to be clear about is God's involvement. There is no need to be afraid of Him, even as we watch the wicked die. In a way, you know, even the wicked have no need to be afraid of God. When they look in His face, there'll be no need to be afraid. He's simply giving them up to the consequences. But those who think that death is a sentence and a penalty, they have a very different God. Look in His face; you don't see love now, you see that other dreadful thing on the other side called "justice." God is not two-faced. He will look with love and justice, all the same time, always, on people. He will look on the wicked at the end, as He looked at Judas. And Judas ran out and committed suicide. So we have evidence in Scripture of this

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indeed.

Well, but doesn't it say God destroys? Yes, that's an interesting Biblical problem. And the best illustration I know of, is the description in Chronicles of how Saul died. You know, he took his sword and fell on it; and committed suicide. Next line: "Thus God slew Saul." He never laid a hand on him; He couldn't protect him any longer; He let him go, and he committed suicide.

So we have lots of evidence in Scripture. But the here-a-little, there-a-little approach is just a stop-gap measure until one has the time to go through all Sixty-six. That's really the only way to feel safe about all these subjects, it seems to me.

Venden: There are two other questions that are really very similar. And I've been reading them over, trying to see if I could bring the two together at one point. But you, I think, have touched on them. This one adds just a bit more, that you could say a little more on:

"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. 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 Great Controversy? Like in words like these:

`Upon the wicked, He shall rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone with a horrible tempest. This shall be the portion of their cup.'"

If I remember correctly, that, of course, is Biblical.

Maxwell: That's Biblical. She didn't invent that.

Venden: It's not Great Controversy words; just drawing upon Scripture. "The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth, devouring flames break forth. The very rocks on fire." And so on. I would like you to go through very carefully, so I can understand what you are saying about this. Now, you've commented on this area before, but. . .

Maxwell: Yeah. The main thing added there, is, why would Ellen White use such dreadful language? Why would the Bible use such dreadful language? She's using the language of Scripture there. Well, why would John the beloved, who wrote the Three Angels' Messages? Why would he write about the eternal burning of the fire and brimstone, "and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever. And they have no rest day or night." You remember? John the beloved wrote the Third Angel's Message. And he also wrote, "There is no need to be afraid of God." So he knew what he was doing.

So one would have to compare the fearsome language of the Third Angel's Message, with all the other places in the Bible, where God thunders on Sinai, and sends she-bears, and terminates the life of Uzzah when he's irreverent. The lengths to which God has been willing to go, to gain our attention, to lead us to take these matters seriously. When we're not ready for the still, small Voice, He'll send the thunder. He'll do that, but we should not misunderstand Him.

Well, Ellen White is so admiring of God's methods used in all Sixty-six books, that she does the very same thing. And even though she's written those fearsome words, quoting them right out of

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Scripture, not everybody's worried, even now. I mean, how many people on the sidewalk are worried about the Third Angel's Message? So there's a time for she-bears. There's a time for the Third Angel's Message. But hopefully, once that has gained people's attention that there are awful events to come, and there is a fiery conflagration at the end, and rebels will perish therein — if that will lead them to take things seriously, then we can tell them, "By the way, we have great good news for you," and tell them the rest of the story.

It's very Biblical, very God-like, to talk as Ellen White has, in this place. She does it many times. But she also has a great deal to say about the obedience that springs from fear. She also says, that to use the warnings of the Second Coming, and the nearness of the Second Coming, to inspire people through fear to make preparation, is very selfish, is not as it should be. See, so that balances it off, very much.

I'm wondering, by the way, what would be useful these next two nights, you know, when we talk about the church. There have been a number of questions come in, that might belong very well even next Friday or the following one; about Ellen White's role in the Adventist Church. I mean, everybody knows. And she's had some very bad press of late. So I would want to deal with the question: Was Ellen White a very good friend of God? Is her picture of God Biblical? I think, absolutely magnificent. If it weren't, I wouldn't trust her; I wouldn't use her. Of course, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. On the basis of here-a-little, there-a-little, people have hurt her and her writings, as people have hurt God and the Scriptures, you know. It's just not fair. But if you'll take those writings as a whole, her picture of God is magnificent, and utterly Biblical. And some of these quotations, like: "The man who obeys God from fear, is in danger of developing the character of a rebel. He would sin if he dared, but he doesn't dare, because he's scared. Such obedience is worthless," she says. It will actually turn us against God, to obey simply because we are required to do so.

She had this very clearly in mind. But that does not usually appear in the press, that she wrote that way. The marvelous statements about freedom, even in the realm of health, you know. She's thought to be the one who taught the idea that if it tastes good, you probably shouldn't eat it. She wrote one time, "Some wish that an exact rule could be prescribed for their diet. This is not as it should be. We should all learn to eat from principle. And we're all different." She says, "Some can eat beans. As for me, beans are poison." And she says, "Some can use milk. For others, it's poison." She didn't know about allergies those days, but she'd made this observation. All God wants of us, is that we be in the best possible health; with all our individual variations from each other, our different digestive systems, and all the rest; in the best possible health this far from the tree of life, so we can think clearly in these last critical days. It's the best possible motivation. Very appealing to people of scientific bent; and most demanding of evidence; and who live to be individuals and free. She's a great supporter of freedom and good sense. And I wish folk knew that.

So I'm wondering if maybe next time or the following one, I might put together a little collection of her most potent passages in support of the larger view, and the magnificent picture of God. If that would be useful to you. It's taken a number of people many, many years to find all of these. Even using the laser discs, you know, where her writings are recorded. And we just got a collection from Africa today, from Kenneth Hart. I don't know how he does it out in Africa, as he rides around on his Suzuki motorcycle. But he sent a floppy disc with all these favorite quotes that he and I admire so much, so I can put it on my little computer and run them up. And he has it all organized the way he does it. And I'll compile some of the best ones from here, if you like,

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and put them together; and we can hand them out. If that would be useful.

Venden: I think that would. Right? Now, there was a question here. And if I'm hearing rightly, you may be wanting to spend a little more special time on it:

"Is the belief in Ellen White as a prophet of God, a key factor, a deciding/dividing factor in your own belief in the Seventh-day Adventist view of Biblical interpretation? If you don't believe she's a prophet, are you without an anchor in Bible interpretation?"

Maxwell: Oh, that's a very interesting one. Just in brief, for some of you may be on your way to Hawaii next weekend. (I know some are, and envy them!) A prophet is a person who speaks in God's behalf. I think she did that magnificently and most Biblically. But is she a determining factor in interpreting Scripture? Yes, but the way she does it. Her way of doing it is: go back and look at the whole of the Bible, and not just here a little and there a little. And she says, "If you can't find it in Scripture," - that's where she found it.

So her mission was to bring people back to the Bible, and help them read it as a whole. In that way, she has been a very great influence in my interpretation of Scripture. But not because I've looked through and found, "Oh, so that's the meaning; this is the meaning; she says it is." She would not have liked that at all. She said, "If you can't find that in Scripture, better be quiet about it until you can." That's how she found it. So she's a great aide to the person who wants to understand the Bible as a whole. And she's an example of using the Bible that way. I wish folk knew that about her.

Venden: All right. There's one more question; and then we'll go to some from the floor. Our time is slipping away. We will have some time for questions the next two Friday nights as well, won't we?

Maxwell: That's right.

Venden: (Quoting) "Dr. Maxwell, you mentioned that it is quite dangerous to decide that some portions of the Bible are merely the reflection of the writer's limitation or misunderstanding. Yet, if some texts are not reflecting the writer's theology, how can you explain expressions like, "And an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul"? Or, "The prophet Micah - or Micaiah - relating what he saw in Heaven. God asking, 'Who can seduce Ahab?' and finally sending an evil spirit to put wrong words in the prophets advising Ahab?"

Maxwell: Which is told twice over; it's that important.

Venden: (continuing the quote) "I would feel very uncomfortable to know that God can send us evil spirits. Isn't it simply a misunderstanding from the writer?"

Maxwell: Now. There's a sense in which that's true, in a sense in which it would be very hazardous. If you have the picture of God wanting to present a very clear picture— He chooses the best people He can, inspires them with beautiful thoughts, and they write it out on the paper, and God winces and says, "That's terrible; but I guess it's the best we can get." Then we wouldn't have much reason for confidence in Scripture.

I think the Bible turned out to be exactly what God had in mind. But now, what God has in mind,

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is to communicate successfully with His children. And He knows where we are. And so when we're scared stiff of Him, He will say, "Ah, I've given you a Friend between." But don't misunderstand that. It is true, the Bible meets us where we are, and speaks the language we can understand, but it's not because of the ignorance of the writer. God is directing; He wants to be described this way, because that's the most effective way to reach us.

Now, if you begin saying, Oh, this story now, say, that God told Abraham to sacrifice his son; I don't think He ever did. Abraham just thought He did, that's the end of a thousand stories in the Bible. Because take the virgin birth of Christ. See, many scholars in the world say, "Of course He wasn't virgin-born; that's impossible; but they thought He was." Because in the mystery religions all around them, the savior was virgin-born, a dying, rising savior. Or take the resurrection. This is a very widely held view among scholars: Of course He wasn't resurrected; that's never happened; but they thought He was, because He said He would be. And they believed it so much, they came to feel sure that He had been resurrected. Then this is due to ignorance.

Tell me where we're going to stop. There is no way to stop if you start doing this. I would rather say: God very definitely spoke to one of the best friends He's ever had, who knew Him so well -- I wish we knew Him that well -- Abraham! He said, "Take your son, your only son, miraculously born, and sacrifice him." Because a very important thing needed to be said and needed to be done.

And I'd have to put that with many other places like it in the Bible; like Hosea: Why would He ask the prophet to marry a woman of dubious reputation? The whole church staff here would be counseling him not to do it. God says, "Marry that woman." So he comes our new counseling—marriage counseling—program. And all the church staff at Loma Linda says, "No, don't do it; that wouldn't be very wise." He says, "But God has told me to." "You must be hallucinating, brother." Well, Hosea had to be pretty sure. And out of it comes the best explanation in the whole Bible, as to the meaning of God's wrath -- something that had to be cleared up -- and how God feels as the wicked die; and what causes them to die. It's the book of Hosea. He sadly gives people up, and cries as they go.

So I would take these stories literally, not due to the ignorance of the writer. Indeed, recognizing the ignorance of people, and God meeting them where they are. But I believe the Bible is as God intended it to be. and He was not surprised at what was written down. Now, partly involved in this, is the question of whether God foreknows the future. And so when God inspired someone, He didn't know for sure how that man's thought processes would deal with this. And so when it turned up on the page, God said, "Oh, I am a little disappointed. I hoped he'd do better."

I believe God knows the end from the beginning, and knew exactly how Hosea would be written, and the story of Micaiah. If God does not know the future, He cannot say how He will triumph in the end; because maybe He will fail. He says, "I will triumph in the end. I will have a group at the end who will be loyal to Me." (And you remember, that came up last time.) He knows the end. If He doesn't know, He doesn't know if He's going to win. He says, "I'll have a whole group of loyal people at the end, who will not let Me down." Just as He could say of Job, in advance, to the adversary: "You may do anything you like to this man, short of taking his life; and he will not let Me down. And he didn't, and God foreknew he wouldn't.

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Then you have no problem with the Scriptures turning out the way they did, you see. God foreknew what it would look like. And He said, "That's what I want." So the Bible does have that human element in it. But don't think it's less trustworthy for this reason. In fact, if what we want to find out from the Bible is the truth about God, God's willingness to meet us where we are, and speak a language we can understand, is some of the very compelling evidence as to the kind of Person He is. He could have written a beautiful book: "I am as follows," you know. And we wouldn't have understood.

So His stooping to meet us where we are, is one of the most winsome things about our God. That's the kind of Person that He is. So even the humanness of the Bible speaks very well of God. As the humanness of Jesus did. To think of the Eternal One, the One who, you know, hung a whole vast universe in space, getting tired and hungry. So tired one time, He slept through a storm, He was so tired. I mean, think what it says about our God, that He came down and lived among us as He did. Ah, these things that look so much like us, speak very well of Him. And we see that all through Scripture. I like that. Not a hindrance to understanding; but a great aid.

So when I read the Bible, I lean in the direction of taking it just the way it reads. And then asking: Why would God want to be so described? Why would He inspire a person to describe Him like this? Well, why did He have John describe Heaven as full of beasts with eyes within and without, and all kinds of things? That's what He showed John. That was appropriate at the time.

The one who wrote that question - that's a very thoughtful one, though - would you want to ask more about that?

Does God send lying spirits? How did God destroy Saul? Why was it written up that way? Well, what we have done through the years, going through book by book, is to accumulate all the places where bad things are attributed to God. Sending a lying spirit— that Micaiah story is incredible. It even discusses the committee up in Heaven working on this, and God saying, "Would anybody volunteer to go down and deceive Ahab into going up into battle, so we can destroy that man?" And one angel said one thing, and another angel said another. You know, they really have open discussion up there. And a spirit stepped forward and said, "I have an idea, God." He says, "What is it?" "I'll go down and be a lying spirit in the mouths of those four hundred prophets." And God said, "You know, that's an excellent idea. You go down and I'll bless you; and we'll get rid of King Ahab." And so Micaiah said, "You see, God sent a lying spirit into the mouths of all these prophets."

Don't ever read just that much! Read the whole story; and you'll see how Ahab was in no position to respect the truth at all. It's a very dramatic story. Do all of you know the story? You see, Ahab was being visited by the king to the— Jehoshaphat, wasn't it? And he said, "Jehoshaphat, will you go up with me to battle?" And Jehoshaphat said, "Well, couldn't we consult the Lord first?" He was a good king. "Do you have any prophets?" "Oh," Ahab said, "I've got four hundred. How many more do we need?" And so they called in the four hundred. And they all said, "Yes, go up into battle, and you will triumph." And Ahab said, "See, the Lord says we'll triumph." And Jehoshaphat said, "But don't you have a prophet of the Lord here?" And Ahab said, "Well, there is another one, but I don't like him, because he never tells me things I want to hear." And King Jehoshaphat said, "Don't say that; please call him."

So they sent an emissary to get Micaiah. And when the emissary arrived there, he said, "Hey,

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Micaiah, all four hundred prophets have told the king he should go up into battle and will succeed. Be sure your testimony is the same as theirs." And Micaiah said, "I'll tell Ahab precisely what the Lord tells me to say." So Micaiah came up, and Ahab said, "Shall I go up into battle? And will I prevail?" And Micaiah said, "Sure, go up into battle, and you will prevail." And Ahab said, "How long have I told you to tell me the truth?" "Well," he said, "all right, you want the truth? If you go up into battle, you'll die."

And the leader of the four hundred prophets turned to Micaiah and said, "Which way did the spirit go from us to you? We told the king he would triumph. Micaiah says he will die." "All right," Micaiah says, "if Ahab goes up into this battle, he will die." And he told the story of the conference up in Heaven, as a dramatic background for God sending a lying spirit into the mouths of the four hundred prophets. In the presence of a king who had no respect for truth whatever. And after he told the story, Ahab said, "Put that man in prison. Feed him on bread and water until I get back." And Micaiah said, "If you get back, God has not spoken through me." And that's the end of the story. As a matter of fact, it includes him being slapped in the face, for telling the king the truth.

Poor Micaiah just had no chance to tell the truth to a king who had no respect for truth. And so this story was told. What should we do with it? I would compare it with the rich man and Lazarus. And many other stories - strange stories made under strange circumstances - to make a particular point. The only point of the Micaiah story is, there was absolutely no respect for truth whatever. A lying spirit was motivating the four hundred prophets. And Ahab was moved by the same lying spirit.

We're left now, with God doing it. Many times in the Old Testament, even God's best friends like Isaiah will say, "Good and evil both come from God." And he's reverent toward God. And you pick up much evidence that out of reverent recognition of God's sovereign control of the whole universe— "the wheels within the wheels" in Ezekiel, representing God in control of all the complexities of human affairs— nothing could happen without God's permission. As in the story of Job. Therefore, if anything happened, good or bad, a devout Jew was inclined to say, "It was the hand of the Lord." But they didn't mean He was determined to do evil in this way; it was recognizing that He was in charge.

Because an inspired writer will say, "Saul fell on his sword and killed himself. Thus God slew Saul." He's already said God didn't have a hand in it. Or in Exodus, God's best friend Moses says, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." "Actually, Pharaoh hardened his own heart," he says two lines below. He knew what he was saying.

So I would suggest accumulating all these places in the Bible, to see if there's a key to it. There's a consistency in here. The Bible writers recognized God is in charge of everything. Satan could not have smitten Job without God allowing him to. And so Job could say, "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away," - He didn't! - "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Naomi could say, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Marah - bitter - for the Lord has dealt bitterly with me." But she loved the Lord, and won Ruth to trust in Him.

So you accumulate that. The only safe way on questions like this, is to read on. It will probably get worse, until eventually you've accumulated enough of these, that eventually the Bible in its consistency, will suggest a solution. So that's why maybe I talked too long on that. Actually, It was much too short. One would want to accumulate all the evidence. The book-by-book

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approach is the only one that makes one feel safe and sure. Bible doctrines books always worried me. I learned my key text faithfully. I remember up at PUC in one year when we had Bible Doctrines, I learned all four hundred key texts one night, while doing several hundred pushups and eating - I kept a count of all the apples, oranges and bananas. Because it took me from 10:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. to learn them all. And then I tiptoed to class, lest I lose one of them on the way. And I took the exam. It didn't do me any good.

Now I can remember the Bible because I remember it as a whole. You know, you remember where the stories are, and how it all fits together. The whole Bible has become a Key Text, a whole Key Book. And it's much, much easier to remember. I wish I had learned this much earlier in life. I'm glad I started almost forty years ago. And still doing it. It's key books. The whole Bible is a Key Book, to be taken as a whole. Then, if somebody shot down twenty-five of your texts, you've got seventy-five more. I mean, it's all the way through. And there's great security in that.

Venden: Would it be appropriate to save people from having to read through the entire Bible, to find the story of Micaiah; to give the reference?

Maxwell: Oh, do tell them where it is.

Venden: I Kings 22.

Maxwell: Also in— elsewhere, too— twice. There will be cross-referenced to another place. I hope I won't keep you from Sabbath School in the morning.

Venden: Well, we have -- well, you can read the story -- well, you told it very well. We have five minutes for live questions. Well, these were live questions from you folks. In these last five minutes, what's the one question of these six months, that you would hope to have answered this evening before we go? Now, I think your hand went up first; then over here. We'll go to yours.

Comment: You talked tonight about God bringing discipline, and disciplining. Could you say a little more about that? Because I've had some people have terrible things to me about that.

Maxwell: Yes. Well now, the King James uses the word "chasten." And in the dictionary, to chastise means to punish. And that's not a good translation. The Greek word is "paideuo." Can you see "p-a-i-d, already, you professional people? "Paid" means a child; as in pediatrician, pedodontics, and so on— a child. "Paideuo" means to instruct as a child. Now, "punish" is not a good translation for that. "To chastise," is a very poor translation. But discipline includes whatever methods are necessary. You see, the word "disciple" comes from "discipline." And a disciple is a student. So to instruct a child as a student in whatever ways you deem appropriate for his best good. That's the meaning of, "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines." It doesn't mean just punished. It might include the laying on of hands, if appropriate. But most of the time it's instruction. In many and various ways, God seeks to instruct those whom He loves. That's the meaning of the word. It's a good word.

Venden: But would— some people sometimes say, for instance, in the loss, let's say, of a little child. They'll say, "Well, the Lord is wanting to teach you something here. It's part of the discipline." Is that what you're. . . ?

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Maxwell: Yeah. Now, God, wouldn't take the life of the child to teach you a lesson. But God would say, "Look, out of this trial let Me teach you." Of course, troubles come from so many, many causes. Sometimes, you know, as you run through the Bible, we're reaping what we're sowing. You say, "Well, that doesn't apply here." Sometimes it's the devil getting at us, and God allowing him to; but He would not allow us to be tested and tempted more than we are able to bear. Sometimes it's just the hazard of living on this planet. I think that's often the case. And God wants us to know that rebellion and disorder makes the world a very dangerous place to live. And many of these tragedies are part of the price of that demonstration. Sometimes it's the Lord disciplining whom He loves.

But then we remember, God would not allow anyone to be tested more than he is able to bear. In all things, God works for good with those who love Him. And we would never ask to be led in any way differently, if we could see the end from the beginning. And God says, "Do you have enough evidence to trust Me through this emergency? If so, you'll be stronger when it's over." And then comes Romans 5. "We even rejoice" - not in a sick way. "We even rejoice in our troubles; knowing that troubles produce endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces a hope that will never let us down."

But still, God doesn't ask us to survive tragedies without the Good News, which is: If it's a death in the family, we'll see that one again. And then your imagination thinks about that, and you remember the verse last week: "Those who have died in the Lord; they rise first." You know, God's trying to make it up to them because they didn't live till He came. "Then we who are alive and remain, are caught up together with them." And Ellen White loves that. She speaks of angels bring children to their mothers' arms. She even speaks of children who have neither parent there, and how they will be cared for. I mean, she tries to fit everything we need to know, to give us comfort.

And even then you fall back on this, knowing the kind of Person God is. You know. He's so fair and so right. He didn't promise to keep us from sorrow and tragedy. It's all around us. But He did say, "Trust Me, and someday I'll be able to explain."

But then we also know Him well enough, that if at times it seems unfair, and we should cry out to God, would He be offended? The book of Job says absolutely not! And you might at one time feel so bad, you would really be saying, "God, how could You do that?" And theological friends may be saying, "D-d-don't do that now, God will get very angry with you, if you push Him." You say, "You go home and read the book of Job. You sound like those three friends to whom Job said, 'Miserable comforters are you all. You don't know God.'" God says, "You may cry to Me all you like. You may raise any question that you like. I'm honored by your confidence in saying these things to Me."

There are so many things in Scripture that might come to mind. And the Holy Spirit will remind us, you remember, of all these things. And thus the Spirit brings peace. You remember in the text tonight? "Peace comes from knowing the truth." So, happy is the person who knows God very well, when the inevitable tragedies come. And that's when I love to see some people survive these times; they get sad, but not hopeless. And it's beautiful. And I've seen several lately. And it's very inspiring to see people survive tragedy, without turning against God at all. They actually turn toward Him even more. My next door neighbor is doing it right now, and it's very wonderful to see.

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Venden: All right. Let's take this one question here.

Comment: Dr. Maxwell, you've turned me to take a real interest in Job. But I have a question on verse 5; chapter 1, verse 5.

"And so, when the days of their fasting [sic] were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually."

Was there any virtue in this? These were adult children.

Maxwell: Well, this is again the idea that prayer is conversation with God as with a friend. They stood as individual in the sight of God. But Job loved his children. And so as he worshiped, he said, "God, my sons do not always behave as they should. Remember my sons." He knew that the sons were free to go their own way. So, one could not take this, you know, by itself. It just speaks very well of Job. And it's a good example of conversation with God as with a friend, being the meaning of prayer.

And you know, don't parents do that. You know, even though— well, you pray for a son who at the moment shows no indication of ever coming back, would you quit? No. You'd go on and on. And you almost say, "God, take him by the scruff of the neck and bring him home. I know You won't; but I just almost wish You would." And God wouldn't say, "Oh, that's bad theology." He'd say, "You really want him back, don't you? Well, so do I. But you and I know that he's free."

I like the way the dialogue [is] in Job. Sometimes Job seems to go too far, and he'd say, "Well, no, let me say that another way, God." And that's why in the end, he said, "I repent, God. I said a lot of things beyond my understanding." God said, "I loved the way you explored, and experimented, and tried different things. You're free to do that. You did a beautiful job, Job." Then it's genuine conversation with God as with a friend. And he starts on page one by doing that, I think, about his children. What do you think you saw? Along that line?

Comment: I think you're right. I have children of my own. and I believe you're right.

Maxwell: See, you'd do it; yeah, we all would.

Venden: Well, we won't have to say Good bye. We'll see you - most of you, less those who have gone to Hawaii, or wherever else! - next Friday night, we hope. We'll meet in the chapel. We hope you know where that is. Just around that way, we'll have the air conditioner on. It should be cool. And we'll have a good time there. [title for next time:] "Where on Earth are God's Friends?"

Maxwell: Right. By the way, I should tell you that originally I was going to entitle that, "Where in the World are God's Friends?" It means almost the same - in the world we're on, earth — until a friend pointed out that some of us who think of ourselves as at least a wee bit saintly, think of the world as out there, you know— the world, the flesh and the devil. So Where in the World are God's Friends? This is Dr. Norm Peckham. He said, "Maybe Where on Earth? might be better. Because that's everywhere. I mean, where on earth, are God's friends? Where on this planet, are those who really love, trust and admire God, and consider it their highest privilege to speak

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well and truly of their God? Those are God's friends.

Now, is there one true church? And what are its marks of identification? I wish you might read that through, and come prepared to help us answer the question.

Venden: All right. Well, lead us in prayer.

Maxwell: Our loving Father in Heaven, once again, appropriately on a Sabbath, that reminds us so much of the truth about Thee, we pause to thank Thee for Thy blessing, these twenty Conversations, for the high privilege that has been ours, as sinful humans who have caused Thee so much trouble, to speak of Thee. We hope we have spoken well and truly of our God. We covet as the highest of all commendations, Thy words about Job, that he has said of Thee what is right. If in any way we have confused or misled someone, help that person. Help us to find him. As friends may we find each other. Help listeners to hear what needs to be heard, even if it is not phrased too well. And above all else, may our conversations lead us back to that Biblical record, the inspired record of the costly demonstration of the truth about Thyself.

How could we possibly regard ourselves as too busy to look at that life-giving message, given by Thy faithful friends, at even great cost to some of them and risk of life? Surely in these last days, knowing that the adversary will be given increasing freedom to deceive and confuse us, not as an obligation, but for our own best good, we would do well to take this ancient Book and be sure we understand it, and not waste any part.

We thank Thee for the promise of Thy same gracious Spirit of truth, who inspired some of our fellow believers to write that record. May He help us understand it. And all of us have read, more or less, in this great Book. We thank Thee for the picture that we find there. We thank Thee for this everlasting Good News. We thank Thee for making the evidence so clear. And we do thank Thee most of all for what it cost.

Surely we have nothing to give up but our own stubborn, unwillingness to listen. We thank Thee for the assurance that Thou wilt save all who trust Thee. And the wonderful information that Thou dost not expect us to trust Thee as a stranger; and so Thou hast given us all this evidence, and seen to it that friends through the years have translated it into hundreds and hundreds of languages - more in our time than at any other in history - that all Thy people on this planet who face these last, confusing days of human history, might have a chance to weigh the evidence and make up their minds about Thee.

Those of us who regard ourselves as friends of Thine, we know how many there are out there, who do not even know how to read the Book. Give us a great desire, and give us skill and persuasiveness, to have these people understand the sixty-six book record of the truth about Thyself. May our church become known more and more for this. May we realize more that the truth is not about us, but about Thee. The Good News, the Gospel, is about Thee. We would like to contribute to this good news, by showing that our trust in Thee, has led to a measure of healing. But we still come short of Thy glorious ideal. But Thou dost never come short. Thou, the infallible, infinite, gracious Physician, Father of us all. And we desire to direct the attention of Thy children on this planet to Thee— not to us, but to Thee, the Gracious One, who waits and waits until this is done. Forbid that we should contribute any longer to the delay. But rise and spread the Good News.

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We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, #20

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

"At Peace With Our Heavenly Father"

AGM: Now, Pastor Venden will come up for the twentieth time to pass on questions about this subject.

Venden: Well, I wish there was going to be a twenty-first and twenty-second and so on. But we do have something to say about a little bonus, don't we, a little later on?

AGM: Right.

Venden: Thinking about our topic as we come to this number twenty, "At Peace With Our Heavenly Father," I believe I hear you emphasizing that peace comes through knowing the truth and knowing that Satan's charges are false. Those charges have been summarized in five words that you've used again and again throughout this series: arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, severe. Those are Satan's charges. But sometimes we hear those charges from strange looks or surprising looks. Just to review this this evening, I'd like to paraphrase a question that may pull all of our thinking in together for just a bit. Arbitrary. Now, when we say, what do we say, that God is sovereign--"the sovereignty of God" has a great ring to it--and I think has a great history of understanding. Didn't God make the world, create it? Can't He run it any way He wants to?

AGM: That reminds us of our earlier discussion. When Romans 9 came up for consideration, the potter and the clay.

Venden: Yes.

AGM: Absolutely, God is sovereign. In the great controversy, larger view, I think He sounds more sovereign than ever. He created this universe precisely as He wished it to be, and He runs it precisely as He wishes to run it and He always will. But the next question is, How does He run it? Arbitrarily? He values nothing higher than our freedom. If we could say He's arbitrary about anything, He's arbitrary about freedom. He'd rather give up everything than give up freedom. That's how arbitrary He is on that. I'm glad He's arbitrary about freedom.

Venden: So you're comfortable with the word "sovereign," but then you want us to understand that sovereign means we're free.

AGM: That's right.

Venden: Rather than that God's arbitrary.

AGM: This is how He exercises His sovereignty.

Venden: Let's take another illustration. Here's this matter of the Sabbath--the seventh day. Isn't that just a matter of God saying, "Well, let's see, We'll take a seventh portion of time, " and it's true because God chose that and that's all there is to it.

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AGM: If all we had of the fourth Commandment was, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Period. But we don't. The fourth Commandment even refers us back to Creation. And you remember the time we discussed the Sabbath as a reminder of the evidence. The Sabbath reminds us of all the evidence that God respects - values nothing higher than our freedom. It reminds us of Eden and the Exodus from Egypt, and the answers given during Crucifixion Week. There are so many reasons for the Seventh-day Sabbath, it can hardly be regarded as evidence of His arbitrariness. He gave us the Sabbath to remind us of all the evidence He has given that He is not arbitrary. So it seems almost perverse to me to suggest the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of our obedience when it's a monument to His not being arbitrary. Just the opposite.

Venden: All right. Let's go to the word "exacting." I think of that reference in the book of James where it talks about, "If you break one of the Commandments, you're guilty of all."

AGM: That is a forbidding way.

Venden: That sounds rather exacting.

AGM: Yes, until we stop and take a look at the Ten Commandments. And we look at Moses' summary of the Ten repeated by Jesus and then by Paul. To love God and our neighbor as ourselves is the fulfilling of the law. It doesn't matter which one of the Ten you break; you are not loving. You break any one of the Ten, and you show you are not a loving person. So it doesn't matter which one you break. It's not an exacting thing. It's really that the Ten Commandments as we have them are really an expansion on the one which is that we love God and love each other which can't be commanded anyway.

Venden: All right. Vengeful. I think about the book of Hebrews. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay." What about, for example, the destruction that takes place at the end?

AGM: Well, since God says that and He does involve Himself in our terrible moment of destruction at the end and many times through the history of Scripture, we have to look at those all very carefully. When God exercises vengeance, how does He do it?

Venden: We have some more questions this evening. I think we've had more questions on this than on any other topic.

AGM: I remember when this came up somewhat before, when God takes vengeance on a person, it may be in a form of discipline, and it may wind up with Him winning that person rather than destroying him. And particularly at the end, Jesus mentioned. There are a number of opportunities maybe this evening coming up to consider. How the wicked perish in the end is demonstrated by the cross.

Venden: Unforgiving. Take Adam and Eve. Here is their first offense, and it appears that they suffer *. They have to leave their Garden home. Why couldn't God have been as Jesus described we ought to be, forgiving "seventy times seven?" Why couldn't He have just said, "Well, you've made one mistake. That's your first. We'll overlook that."

AGM: Well, if sin were merely breaking the rules, if sin were merely a legal matter, He could

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have forgiven us and let it go. But sin changes people. In fact, I'd want to turn that around and say, I believe He forgave them. Like the father of the prodigal son, he forgave him even as he left home. He regarded him with forgiveness as he wallowed in the pigpen. But forgiveness does no good unless you respond. I mean, forgiveness doesn't heal the damage done. The problem here is not that God was unforgiving, but that having sinned, we were changed. And what was needed was not so much forgiveness as healing the damage done. I would say God forgave Adam and Eve. Of course He did.

Venden: We're back to that crucial point that you made rather early on in our series that how we understand sin, the problem.

AGM: What went wrong.

Venden: What was wrong.

AGM: Not a legal problem; a real problem.

Venden: A real problem that has to have healing and not just some kind of legal adjustment.

AGM: That's it exactly.

Venden: Well, the last word, severe. I can say someone saying, "Isn't that too harsh a penalty for not loving and obeying?"

AGM: Yes, if death were a penalty, that is incredibly severe. But if it's consequence, that's something else entirely. All that death says is that sin is a very serious matter. It changes us like that. But unfortunately, we grow up and speak about death as an imposed sentence and penalty. That puts God in a very severe light.

Venden: I think that idea is very strong.

AGM: Yes.

Venden: And to get that clearly in mind that we're talking about, consequence and not penalty that God imposes on us.

AGM: Yes.

Venden: The second question I want to raise follows on from this. In the book of Revelation, it describes God as resurrecting the wicked at the end of the Millennium. Why does God do this? They are the wicked. They are lost anyway. Why not just leave them asleep? Isn't that harsh?

AGM: Imagine the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah arising and looking around and saying, "Here we go again!" It seems cruel *, doesn't it, to resurrect them? There would have to be a purpose. By the way, the word "Millennium" is another Latin word that you won't find anywhere in Scripture, like "justification," "sanctification." Just as in the Bible *.

Venden: Well, it's nothing. A thousand years?

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AGM: "Mille" is a thousand, and "annus" is a year. We know the word "annus" as in A.D., Anno Domini, the year of the Lord. So "millennium" is a thousand years. And it's true, at the end of the thousand years between the Second Coming of Christ and the Third Coming, between the resurrection of the righteous and then the resurrection of the wicked. The rebels are resurrected, to be sure. I mean, why would God do that? I mean what suffering! How terrible to see loved ones out there. God would only do this if it would say something of very great importance that would contribute to our understanding and the security of the universe. One thing we'll see, if we should wonder why Uncle Bill is not in the Kingdom, Uncle Bill who said, "If you just prove it to me, I'd come in." And there's Uncle Bill out there. And here's the New Jerusalem. Here's Christ in His human form. Here's all the evidence, and Uncle Bill is not moved one bit. In fact, Revelation goes on to say that Satan moves among these rebels who have been resurrected and he deceives them into marching against the New Jerusalem as if to destroy Christ again. And you say, "God, Your diagnosis was right. More time, more evidence would have done no good for Uncle Bill."

Venden: So that resurrection is a part of the essential demonstration.

AGM: It's a confirmation.

Venden: That God * in peace.

AGM: When God says, "Now, Uncle Bill was not safe to save," and I look at my bumper sticker and say, "Well, if You've said it, I believe it. That's all there is to it." And God says, "You know better than that by now. I want you to see the evidence. You'll weep when you see it, but Uncle Bill will not respond."

Venden: Speaking of the millennium now, this thousand-year period, what are the saints, the redeemed - those who are saved - what are they doing?

AGM: Yes, I like to remember what Peter said, "With the Lord a thousand years is like a day." You could have translated that "A millennium is like a day, and a day is like a millennium." I don't think we need to worry about the time. I think that a thousand years with the Lord will seem like a day. But I think there are important things that have to happen during that time. The angels have had a chance during what we call the Investigative Judgment, though that's not a Biblical term. This time when the family meets to consider candidates for the Kingdom, so that our future neighbors and friends may be satisfied that it's safe to admit rebels like us. What about us? We're not seeing that. I think during the Millennium those who have been adjudged safe to save will have their opportunity to ask questions, see the evidence, find out why Mother isn't there. I find that very sad. Well, I know He'd be fair about it, that He would show me the evidence so I'd be satisfied. More than that, there's another very gripping thing that may need to happen during the Millennium. We will be preparing ourselves to face that awful scene when the wicked are resurrected and die in a fiery moment of destruction. We'll have to see that someday. Are we ready to see it and not become afraid of God? Well, I think those of us who grow up who may be alive to see Christ come, we will have been so settled into the truth that we can see the seven last plagues and not become afraid of God. We might be ready to see this. But think of all the babes in the truth who have saved from the foot of Mt. Sinai. Think of the thief on the cross. Think of all the others who have not had time and evidence to become concerned in this. Everyone must be ready for that awesome day when God may call to us - I'm saying of everybody who will be inside the New Jerusalem that day - when God says, "Children, you know

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what's coming next. Do you want to come out to the wall and watch? Or do you want to hide in the basement somewhere? You know I'm about to give My rebellious children up and untold numbers of them are going to die. And you know why I've waited so long." And so we stand, perhaps, and watch our God, as fire comes down from Heaven and the glory of Him who is love will consume all that is out of harmony. And we know, because we are convinced about this, that as the wicked die, God will be crying, "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" He's no more angry with them than He was with His Son as He gave Him up in Gethsemane and on Calvary. And then when it's all over, God will turn to us and say, "How awful that was. But children, I have one last question to ask you all: Have I made you afraid? Because if I have, I've let it happen too soon, and I would have waited longer." But hopefully we'll be so settled into the truth that we'll be able to say to God, and maybe get a little closer and say, "It's all right God. There was no other way." And then there is peace forever, in spite of that awful end. Are we ready to see that and not be made afraid? Because if it makes us afraid, then we'll serve Him from fear, and the obedience of fear produces the character of a rebel, and God still has the seeds of sin in His universe and He has not won the war.

Venden: We're back where it began.

AGM: We're back at the very beginning.

Venden: At the end of the book of Revelation is that beautiful statement, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." It just struck me as you were describing that, that maybe we'll need to wipe the tears even from God's eyes.

AGM: Oh, I like that thought very much. As His children, wouldn't that be appropriate? To get a little closer and say, "It's all right, God. It's all right."

Venden: We have had more questions in this area, and we have quite a number of them here yet this evening that I think we ought to touch on. For instance, one of our friends wrote: "If God does not punish, then who sends the fire down from Heaven on the wicked?" Now you've already alluded to that. Who caused Ananias and Sapphira to fall dead?

AGM: I would want to make a difference between the two. Ananias and Sapphira - that's what the Bible calls the first death - and they will be resurrected. And what their future is, is between them and God. It's this awful death at the end. Now, when fire comes down from God and consumes them, God is there, no doubt about it. But as we have discussed before, this is His life-giving Glory which is described in the Bible as "having the appearance of fire." It's life-giving. In fact, if we were among the saved, we would have been living in this life-giving Glory for a thousand years, and it doesn't hurt anybody. It's only if we're willfully and rebelliously out of harmony with God. God in mercy has veiled this life-giving Glory. His "strange act" sometimes so called, is when He ceases to veil His life-giving Glory, and this earth is no longer a dark place, but His Glory fills the earth and all that is out of harmony is consumed. He doesn't turn His back on this. He's there. He's watching His children. It's His Glory. But He's not torturing His dying children to death. That's the difference.

Venden: I like what you said in one of our discussions afterward in Fellowship Hall, that we will live in that Glory for all eternity. We will never want it to go out.

AGM: Oh, I like the fact that this is everlasting fire. If the fire is God's Glory, it had better not go

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out. We will live in this everlasting fire for eternity, but it's His life-giving Glory.

Venden: Someone raises the same basic question about the Flood. God doesn't kill? What about the Flood?

AGM: Ah, that again is the first death. I see God bringing the Flood as an emergency measure and a very serious one and a very risky thing for Him to do, lest we serve Him from fear. And certainly the Flood didn't win many souls. They built a tower to escape Him thereafter. But He did it to preserve contact with the human race. That's the first death, though. And all who died in the Flood will be resurrected.

Venden: Now, that follows on to another question, and since this is our final evening, we'd better get into some of these. "How do we explain the happenings recorded in the Old Testament where God told His people again and again to wipe out the enemy? Here's God's children being instructed. How do you reconcile that with a loving God?"

AGM: Ah, before He did that, He said to the children of Israel, "When I take you out of Egypt, I'll send My angel ahead of you; I'll even send the hornets ahead of you. I'll use the forces of Nature. Let Me do it. Let Me put My sinful children to sleep in the land of Canaan." But they didn't trust Him on this, so many other things He sought to do for them. And so He stooped and met them where they were and helped them fight. He hated the fighting. When David wanted to build the Temple, He said, "You're a great man as a warrior, but you've been a man of blood. That's not My ideal," and He went on record as not wanting the fighting. He never designed His people to fight their way into Canaan. But in their lack of faith, He helped them fight.

Venden: "I know that God does not have the right to take away our eternal life, although He does have the power to do so, but still, does He even have the right to take away our life on this earth?" I think this question is talking about the first death that you referred to.

AGM: Yes.

Venden: Why should or would God ever want ever want to interrupt our pursuit of happiness?

AGM: There are two things there. Who determines what God's rights are? As Sovereign, He's going to do precisely as He wishes to. We don't give Him His rights. However, the kind of Sovereign He is, He does want His children to see Him as doing what is right. He wants to be seen to be right. That is a great concern to Him. So then we bring up the question: Does He have a right to intervene? I would say, if God had not intervened, we would have destroyed each other long ago. It isn't a matter of does He have a right to interfere with my pursuit of happiness? Had He not intervened, there wouldn't be any of us here pursuing happiness at all. I think the human race proves itself *.

Venden: Even just consequence of just what sin does in our relationship to one another.

AGM: Yes. Yes.

Venden: All right.

AGM: So I'm glad He has intervened. It's not to deprive me of my freedom; it's to preserve it,

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that He has these emergency measures to do that.

Venden: Now, this question touches on something you referred to in your presentation. There are texts which indicate that Christ intercedes. This idea that we need a Friend to stand between us and God. So this questioner says, "There are the texts; Christ intercedes for us." Now, in what sense is that true?

AGM: Well, we need to ask the question in Romans 8, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who can bring any accusation? We know who the accuser of the brethren is who accuses them day and night before God (Revelation 12:10). But we've sometimes made God the One against us. The adversary is the one against us. And Christ does meet his charges, for the enemy of God is our enemy too. There are times, though, where God has said, "I have given you priestly intercession; even My Son in between, because I know how scared you are of Me." And so as an emergency measure He has sometimes spoken of Someone coming in between, but we need to read John 16:26. Really, "there is no need for anyone to intercede with the Father, not even the Son to intercede with Him, because the Father loves us Himself." So we need to put all those passages together.

Venden: Our problem is making that distinction, isn't it, that Jesus is friendlier, kinder, more loving than the Father?

AGM: How sad to come to that conclusion. Yet, if the Father sees us thinking the Son is kinder than He is, He's not jealous of His Son.

Venden: He just wants us to get the message.

AGM: He wants us to get the message. And many of us will arrive in the Kingdom more comfortable with the Son than with the Father. And I keep imagining what it will be like to arrive in the Kingdom and say to the Son, "Thank You for begging the Father not to kill us." Things like that. And by and by He'll say, "Look, it's time you met the Father." So He'll take us into His Presence and we'll stand there looking at the floor maybe in fear. And the Son will say, "Look a little higher. Look into His face. What do you see?" A Face that is just as kind as the face of the Son. And don't say, "Father, thank You for letting the Son persuade You not to kill me." He wouldn't be angry, but He'd know we still needed a little work.

Venden: He would want us to grow up.

AGM: He would. But He'll be patient.

Venden: Let's shift gears with this question: "If God knows what we need, why do we have to pray in order to be provided with our needs?" That occupied another evening in our series, I think.

AGM: Yes. Well, what I'm impressed with is He provides us with what we need whether we pray or not. That's what's so generous about Him. Then should we not pray? But prayer is "conversation with God as with a Friend," and He really is our Friend, so we will talk to Him about these things anyway. We don't just thank Him for today's groceries, you know.

Venden: That's right, we don't talk with our wives or other friends we may have.

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AGM: When we need something from them.

Venden: Only when we need something.

AGM: That' s right.

Venden: Here's an interesting question that I think probably more than one of us has wondered about: "Should we pray to the Holy Spirit?"

AGM: I think that would be most appropriate. Father, Son and Holy Spirit; all Three co-equally, co-eternally God. However, I think there's a special historical meaning in praying to the Father in the name of the Son who revealed the truth about the Father with the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who helps us because we don't know how to pray as we should. Because it reminds us of God's whole way of wining us back to the truth. So I like to do that. Pray to the Father in the name of the Son, in grateful recognition for what He's done, but with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Venden: And I guess we don't have to worry about the Holy Spirit getting His feelings hurt.

AGM: Ah, in the same way, the Members of the Godhead outdo One Another in honoring Each Other.

Venden: In our Bible Reference Sheet you referred to Romans 7 and 8 and this struggle that goes on. What is this struggle? When is it? Is it before conversion, or is it after conversion?

AGM: I've often wished instead of a verse there had been room for a whole chapter on our Bible Reference Sheet. "Oh, the good that I would do, I don't do; and all the evil that I don't want to do, that I do. I delight in the law of God in my inner man, but in my body I feel it * the law." People say, "That couldn't be a converted person." And yet if he delights in the law of God, he sounds like a converted person. The answer I like to give is this: If you are struggling before conversion, if you are struggling during conversion, if you are struggling after conversion, if you're ever struggling, then look to Jesus Christ. It doesn't really matter. I think it's an unnecessary struggle as to when the struggle occurs. Whenever you are struggling, before, during or after conversion, thanks be to God for Jesus Christ our Lord. I refuse to be drawn into an argument about this.

Venden: All right. I was remembering a paper that I did about thirty years ago on this subject. I can't remember where I came out, but I wish I'd come out with that answer. That's a better one than I came out with, I'm sure. Talking about peace, the sense of guilt that so often we as human beings live with, surely guilty people are not a peace with God. What is God's remedy for guilt?

AGM: What worries so many people about guilt is the fear that goes with it. I mean, I was caught with my hand in the cookie jar; what is He going to do to me? There's a lot of fear mixed in there. There's also a feeling of loss of dignity and self worth. The woman taken in adultery felt very guilty and felt very ashamed. And the first thing Jesus did was to restore her dignity and self respect. He did that time after time. How can we act with dignity as people created in God's image if we have our self respect destroyed. Guilt has been allowed to torture people much too

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much because of the curse of the legal model, in my view. In the great controversy larger view, the emphasis is on the truth about God. How does God regard His child who is in trouble? Look at the prodigal son. The father says, "Look, don't even finish your speech of repentance. Come home and get a shower and put on the best clothes I've got and look, I'll give you back your privilege of going to the bank and drawing out the rest of the estate." He gave him that ring of authority. He sought to give him back his self respect. And the son said, "But I am guilty; look what I have done." And he said, "Look, I'm willing to forget it if you will." Who's the one who wanted the son to have it rubbed in from time to time? The pious elder brother, you know. But as far as our God is concerned, He's our Physician, He doesn't want to talk about guilt. He doesn't even want to dwell long on forgiveness. He says, "Son, you're my patient; you've come home; you trust me. Let's not waste any time on the past. Let's work from here on. I want to make you well. And if you're depressed about what you've done, it's going to retard your healing, so please forget it the way I am."

Venden: Are you saying then that the real answer to the gnawing anguish of guilt is a closer acquaintance with God and trust in Him?

AGM: The remedy for everything is the truth about God. The remedy for guilt is to know what God is like.

Venden: From early on in our series, and again and again this has come up, you have mentioned several times during this question and answer time that you go through the Bible verse by verse four times a year with groups. My question is, how can I get in on one of these groups?

AGM: Well, we do it in a year. We do it book by book, because when we go verse by verse it takes much longer. But we do do it three or four, five times a year, and I don't know when the next time would be convenient, but surely it will be announced perhaps in our church program.

Venden: We'll try to make sure that the news of that is widespread.

AGM: In the meantime, though, they could listen on cassette recordings.

Venden: I want to mention that. Garry and Cheri Kirk have a ministry that many of us have been so blessed by.

AGM: That's for sure.

Venden: And if I've been hearing you rightly, this entire series of all Sixty-six, the Truth About God Through All Sixty-six, is available from the Kirks. I'm going to mention a phone number here that will be on the video, but people listening on the radio won't see it, so let me give a phone number. Area code is (714) 792-0111. Once again now 792-0111. You call that number and someone there, the Kirks themselves or a helper maybe, will tell you about how you can get that set on cassettes. And that's true even for this series, isn't it?

AGM: Yes, this series also.

Venden: The audio tapes.

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AGM: Yes.

Venden: And should we give the address too, perhaps?

AGM: * on radio.

Venden: We have enough time. Let's take the time. 1341 Pine Knoll; two words, Pine Knoll, Redlands, California 92373.

AGM: They've recorded several trips through all Sixty-six, and they recorded it once again last year. So there's a fresh approach.

Venden: A fresh sense. All right. We know what God gave up to have peace in His universe, but in the cost of this peace that is ours, I guess I'd like to close with this question, Graham: What is it that we have to give up to really have peace?

AGM: In a sense, we don't have to give up a thing. However, we do have to give up prejudice, bias, fixed opinions. You think how the Son of God was here as the most consummately skillful and persuasive Teacher of the truth there will ever be in all eternity. God Himself in human form. And He came to a very pious people who had bought the devil's picture of God. And therefore were doing so many of the right things but for the wrong reasons, they were moved by law and fear. And Jesus couldn't change their minds. He did a few, and more later on, the ones who gave us the marvelous picture in the New Testament. We do have to give up an unwillingness to listen, a self-satisfied stubbornness that there can be no new ideas. We do have to be willing to investigate this evidence. We have to give that up. But in the end, we don't give up a thing. It's a gift to us. And you wonder how anybody could turn it down. Remember in Galatians Paul said, "Oh, you dear idiots in Galatia." So maybe we have "dear idiots scattered all over the planet," and he says, "who has cast a spell over you?" We must realize the devil is our foe. He does not want us to see the truth. But forbid we should be even "dear idiots;" we should not turn it down. What good news!

Venden: Yes.