

ATONEMENT

Quotations by Graham Maxwell

Preface

- I. Atonement – word: Origin, Definition and Use
- II. Sin and Consequences; Wrath
- III. Sacrificial System and Other Emergency Measures
- IV. Intercession
 - Servants vs. Friends
 - Heavenly Sanctuary
- V. Prodigal Son Story
- VI. At-one-ment: Restoration of Relationship, Healing the Damage of Sin
- VII. At-one-ment Leads to Perfection and Freedom
- VIII. Articles

PREFACE

Many of the references used in this document are transcriptions of audio presentations; the materials originate with and are copyrighted by Graham Maxwell. In the transcription process errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or sentence fragments may occur. Audio links are provided, where possible, and readers are encouraged to listen to the original audio formats.

Additional or Expanded Graham Maxwell References on the Atonement

Direct links to audio and/or written versions for the references listed below are also included.

Audio:

Atonement and Your Picture of God: Audio series recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

Books:

Can God be Trusted? Chapter 8 “Why Did Jesus Have to Die?” <http://pkp.cc/cgbt>

Servants or Friends? Another Look at God Chapter 12 “Friendship and the Meaning of Atonement” <http://pkp.cc/sof>

Articles:

“The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence”

http://www.pineknoll.org/phputil/forceupload.php?file=resources/written/graham/costly_evidence.pdf

“Why Did Jesus Have to Die?” An Interview with Graham Maxwell, 1990

[Why Did Jesus Have to Die \(PDF\)](#)

“Justification; Set Right with God”

<http://www.pineknoll.org/phputil/forceupload.php?file=resources/written/graham/justification.pdf>

Transcriptions:

“Jesus Talks About Atonement” 1990 sermon, Azure Hills Church, Grand Terrace, California

[Jesus Talks About Atonement \(PDF\)](#)

“The Three Most Fundamental Questions in the Great Controversy”

I: Atonement – word: Origin, Definition and use

Well, first, the word 'atonement' itself. Often we're prisoners of traditional ideas about a word, and we need to examine it carefully. And words are just symbols of ideas, and people read ideas into words; it's very flexible. What do we mean when we say 'atonement'? Someone came up to me and said, "I heard you don't believe in atonement." I said, "I certainly do." I added, "But tell me, what do you believe 'atonement' means?" "Why," I said after his reply, "I still believe in the atonement, but I don't believe it in the way you do." So, what does 'atonement' mean?

Now, commonly, in the last century or two or three, it has come to mean 'making amends, paying a penalty, to meet legal demands, that adjustment to legal standing may be justly accomplished.' That is not the original meaning of the term, and it is definitely not the meaning of the biblical word. The biblical word in Greek is '*kattalage*'. There's no hint of making amends there. It's 'reconciliation'. If you had a chance to read in the book, I have more evidence there. But even in the announcement that went out in the newsletter, I made mention that all the dictionaries agree that this word 'atonement' is a made-up word. 'At-one-ment'. Now, that seems almost too cute to be true. But that's the way it started. But it was based on a verb, 'to one'. Two people are fighting, and you are sent out to 'one' them. Not 'win' them, to 'one' them; o-n-e. And then when you have succeeded in 'one-ing' people, then, hopefully, they would remain in a state of oneness. And the state of being 'at one', in harmony, is 'atonement'.

Now, if you want to read the history of the word, there's only one dictionary that really does it, and that's a multi-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*. And if you look in there for the history of the word, it's very colorful. It shows how for a long time it was used in its original sense of being at one, reconciling people to harmony; friendship is often mentioned, unity, and so on. Now, later on somehow, it was changed to mean 'making amends, paying penalty', and that's the way it's commonly used now. But that is not the original word, and that is not the meaning of the Greek. That's the way a word can develop. Tomorrow is Mother's Day. Let's say you have promised to take your wife out to dinner tomorrow night, because it's Mother's Day. And you get home at 10:30. You forgot. And so you stopped by an all-night florist, and you bought two dozen red roses this time, and maybe two pounds of Lady Godiva chocolates; I mean, the most expensive you can find, and you present yourself at the door, with the flowers and the chocolates well ahead of you as you go in. You see, you are atoning. I mean, you are making amends, you are trying to propitiate her wrath, you see. That's what the word has come to mean. And then after, perhaps, all those efforts have resulted in a continuation of conversation, the wife may say, "Now I can tell you a further way in which you may, in fact you will, atone for what you have done. You will take me out to dinner every Sunday night for the rest of the year." And that's part of 'atonement', you see. Well, admittedly, if those measures would

restore oneness, that's right. But it is the oneness that is the atonement, not the paying of the penalty, you see. But somehow it's been written into this word, regrettably.

Now, with using the meaning of making amends and paying penalty, it's customarily said that Jesus never talked about atonement. You have to read Paul. Actually, Paul never used it either. The only place you'll find the word, in the *King James Version*, is in the verse that's changed in the *Commentary*, Romans 5:10. It's the only place in the whole New Testament. But the word in the Greek is a very common word. It's the word 'reconciliation'. In fact, in the *King James*, there's a little note that really this word means reconciliation. I don't know why they put atonement in there, because it has caused a lot of confusion, I think, since. But, when one says that Paul and Jesus did not use the word 'atonement', let's add some other words. Paul never used the word 'justification', or 'sanctification', or 'propitiation', or 'expiation'. And whenever you read that he has said 'justice', remember that that is exactly the same word translated regularly, 'righteousness'. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Atonement and Your Picture of God*, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

"Do you believe in the atonement?" When asked that question, I like to say, "Tell me what you mean by the atonement." To some that's the thing Christ did to reconcile the Father unto us and assuage His offended wrath. A very legalistic view, but if you take atonement to mean at-one-ment, harmony, unity, the marvelous unity of the Trinity, they are as one; they outdo one another in honoring each other. That's atonement, that's harmony, that's unity. God wishes us all to share in that. Yes, we believe in the atonement and that Christ died that there might be peace and reconciliation and an end to the war.

Do you believe it cost the blood of Christ? If Jesus had not died we would have had no answers to the questions in the great controversy. Some say that "the great controversy people have a bloodless atonement". By that they mean there is no blood to take to God so He'll look at it and say, "That's the right blood, I'll forgive you." That is such a twisting of the truth.

God is forgiveness personified. He offers us forgiveness. As His Son died He was saying, "I forgive you, I forgive you" to those killing him wasn't He? They weren't asking to be forgiven. Was Jesus saying, "Father, forgive"? No. He was God. He was forgiving. "I forgive you." And we have taken a legal system and put it back on God. The great controversy view of the cross makes the cross far more significant than the view that is preoccupied with the adjustment of our legal standing with the Father.

On Sunday, Resurrection Sunday, Jesus went up to Heaven and asked the angels, far more of them than of us, "Was it enough? Did I answer your questions?" And they bowed their heads and Revelation tells us they've never tired of thanking Him for clearing it up and paying such a

price. But think what it says about God that He does not desire the service of fear. Love and trust and freedom are not enforceable, it can't be done. And if you have time to look through those quotations there are such potent ones there that love cannot be commanded or produced by force. "This new commandment I give you" said Jesus, "actually I can't command it; I'm just talking in language you can understand." You cannot command love. Ever try it on your wife or your children? It doesn't work. Neither does it with God and we have eloquent statements here. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Understanding the Mission of the Church, number 6, recorded September, 1983, Camp AuSable, Michigan} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/6MMUTMOTC>

The purpose of the plan of salvation is to restore that trust, to bring the rebellion to an end, and thus to establish at-one-ment once again in the whole universe. All of God's children are unavoidably involved.

Some seem to find it disappointing, even offensive, to learn that Christ did not die primarily for them. But unless God wins this war and reestablishes peace in his family, our salvation is meaningless. Who would want to live for eternity in a warring universe?

Without this larger understanding of a conflict that has involved the universe, it's hard to understand Paul's explanation that Jesus shed his blood to bring peace, reconciliation, and unity to God's children in heaven as well as on earth. But recognition of the war and its issues helps one to take a larger view of the cross and of the plan of salvation and atonement. The kind of unity God desires cannot be commanded or produced by force or fear. In the course of human history, many tyrants have tried to maintain unity by terror and brutality. But that kind of at-one-ment does not last. Look at what has happened in a number of countries just in recent years.

The kind of at-one-ment God desires is described in the New Testament as a unity that is "inherent in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God." People who love and trust the same Jesus and the same God are naturally attracted to each other. The same truth about God that sets them free from tyranny and fear binds them together in the firmest kind of unity. Friends of a friendly God enjoy at-one-ment with each other.

This is where the meaning of the cross is so important. There can be no friendship and at-one-ment where there is fear. Calvary says there is no need to be afraid of God. When God says, "Be my friend," he's not saying, "Be my friend or I'll punish you severely; I'll even put you to death." You don't talk that way to friends—especially if you want to keep their friendship. And friendship is the whole purpose and meaning of atonement. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, pp. 164-65. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter12.html>

II: Sin; Consequences; Wrath

“We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sins. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing,” now that sounds more like Romans 1 and Galatians 6, “and the sure result is ruin and death.” And on that Galatians and Romans say exactly the same thing; we reap what we’ve sown. God will give us up to the consequence of our own rebellious choice; and this is the wrath of God. That’s in *1 Selected Messages*, page 235. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, part 5, recorded March, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/5MMGALATIANS66>*

Many believe that God has long been angry with the human race, most reluctant to forgive and bless His erring creatures. For thousands of years men have offered sacrifice—sometimes their children—to win the favor of an offended god. Even in the Christian world some teach that, were it not for constant intercession, God could not find it in His heart to love and save us sinners.

But need we do anything to make God love us?

Nothing is more emphatic in Scripture than that God has always loved—even His most wayward child. When God said, “In the day that you eat of it, you shall die,” He was uttering no arbitrary threat. In love for His creatures, He was only warning of the consequence of rebellion.

Sin so changes the sinner that it actually results in death. Separated from the Source of life, he will surely die. Out of harmony with his Creator he can no longer endure the glory of His presence. {Maxwell, A. Graham. *You Can Trust the Bible; why, after many translations, it is still the word of God*, pg. 69. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1967}

How did God apparently overlook men’s former sins? Didn’t God say in the beginning, if you sin you will die? Not that I’ll kill you in anger, but you will die. It was a warning, not a threat. The devil said that’s a lie, thereby meaning, God is not trustworthy. He has lied to you and is not worthy of your faith. At other times Satan has twisted this to mean if you should die, it will be because God in His anger has executed and killed you. He plays both sides of that argument.

When Jesus died on Calvary, He demonstrated to the overwhelming satisfaction of the whole on- looking universe that God had indeed told the truth; Satan is the one who had lied. It is true that if we sin, we will die. But did God execute His son in anger? God was crying over His son - How can I give you up? And Jesus cried; why have you given me up? As Romans 4:25 says: “He was given up.”; and as Romans 1:24, 26, 28 says, “God’s wrath is His giving us up, letting us

go, turning us over to the awful consequences of sinful rebellion. Jesus was made to be sin, as if He had rebelled, and rebelled to the point where there was no remedy, no hope for Him. He died the death of a sinner. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 4, part 1, recorded 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/7MMROMANS66>*

God's wrath is simply His turning away, in loving disappointment, from those who do not want Him anyway. Thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choice. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 2, part 1, recorded 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/3MMROMANS66>*

A father has a son; he also has to keep rat poison in his garage. And he says, "Son, don't touch the rat poison. That's an order." And he puts it on a high shelf in the garage. A little later he hears a crash in the garage, and he rushes out and his son is lying, dying on the garage floor; he's drunk the rat poison. And the father says, "Son, I forgive you, I forgive you." And he dies. Forgiveness doesn't keep you from dying, does it? But what if the father says, "If I catch you eating that poison, I'll kill you." So you run out into the garage and he's drunk the rat poison and he's feeling fine. Tastes just like "Gatorade", there's no problem with rat poison, you see. And the father says, "You have drunk my rat poison? You remember what I said? I'm going to kill you." And the mother comes running out and says, "No, don't kill Billy; kill me." The father says, "Let me think that through a moment. Yes, Mother. You're a very important person; I'll kill you instead." And the son watches the father kill his mother. He says, "I'm impressed." It's worse than that. It's worse than that. In my book it is. So what if the father says, "Son, I don't want you to die. I'll drink the rat poison." Now what happens? They both die. That's all. You see, it's only in the legal model that this kind of substitution has any effect whatsoever. It's in the legal-execution model. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Questions People Are Asking About the Plan of Salvation, recorded April, 1983, Redlands, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP> (Part 2)

III: Sacrificial System and Other Emergency Measures

And Ellen White indicates that if they hadn't forgotten the meaning of that one lamb, they never would have had all the things that followed. She even says there would have been no need for the Ten Commandments if they had heeded the simple commands given to Abraham. There would have been no need for circumcision. It's just that God added and added and added because we needed it. Finally we have this complicated system, which in some ways makes it more and more difficult to understand the truth. The simple truth was, as Hebrews put it, the killing of the animals didn't solve the problem. It says every time they killed the animal, there was a reminder of sin. It **did not** solve the problem. All the blood that was shed did not solve the problem. Now under the law without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin. But it didn't work. It didn't clear things. Not until Jesus came and said, "You don't desire sacrifice, what you want is truth in the inner man"; you want open ears. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Atonement and Your Picture of God, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)*

If you have thought of the sacrifices as somehow serving as a propitiation, or somehow serving as making it possible for God to adjust your legal standing, because you believe in a God who says, "Obey me and I'll reward you; disobey me and I'll have to kill you." If you've bought that whole understanding, then the only difference when Christ comes is we now have a really influential sacrifice. But it's viewed in the same system.

But if one has gone through the Old Testament, and perceived the criticism the prophets leveled on the way they misunderstood the sacrifices. If you read in the fifty-first Psalm where David says, "It's just dawned on me, You don't want sacrifice; You want truth in the inner man. You want a new heart and a right spirit." He says, "I'll go on offering you sacrifices, but they'll be right ones from now on. I realize that if all the sacrifices don't result in conversion and a new heart and a right spirit, I'm not going to be saved because of my sacrifices at all." Or Micah says, "With what shall I come before the Lord? With ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I sacrifice my own son for my sins?" Remember that whole list? And the next line is, "You know very well how you should approach God". You should bring Him the blood of His Son? No. Never once is it said like that. It says, "You know how to approach God. You come and walk humbly with your God. You approach Him with integrity, with reverence and a willingness to listen." That's all God wants. And I find all the prophets are in total agreement with that. I believe that the ceremonial system was misunderstood. And we call that misunderstanding legalism. They thought that all the sacrifices and the rituals and the ceremonies and the Sabbath-keeping and the circumcision would somehow make it possible for God to keep them in good and regular standing and bless them.

And we say that the answer to ceremonialism is to substitute the blood of Christ for the blood of bulls and goats. Whereas actually, we're just as ceremonial as we were before. Because we understand His death as accomplishing exactly what the blood of bulls and goats was mistakenly thought to accomplish before; it's just now we have more influential blood. Now that to me is a caricature of ceremonialism. And I believe that the forensic view has made that mistake. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Questions People Are Asking About the Plan of Salvation, recorded April, 1983, Redlands, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP> (Part 2)

The emphasis on blood itself—if only we could rediscover what it meant to them in the beginning...Now we know what it became in due course of time...I saw an advertisement for a book this week—I was tempted to get it—it's a whole history of blood atonement in paganism, and other religions as well as Christianity. Blood has been used all through history, "in many and various ways." The Bible refers to the blood; I just want the truth about it. What is the meaning of his shedding of his blood? It really means he died. He died. So we want to talk about his death. It's interesting that if we talk and talk and talk about the significance of his death and don't use the word "blood," some say you don't believe in a "blood atonement." That's extraordinary to me. It's as if there really was "power in the blood," which is "haematolatriy".

. . . (Seeing the sacrifice of Jesus as doing something to God) implies several very serious theological mistakes on the part of those who take that view. Do we really believe that Jesus was God? Mighty God, everlasting Father—do we believe that? By implication: No! We make Him lesser. And that's why some of those who opposed "the truth" at Minneapolis were Aryans, like Uriah Smith. Aryanism fits beautifully. But if the One who came really was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, we have God on His knees washing His betrayer's feet with no one in between. And He hoped they would get the message. Now He couldn't tell this at Sinai. Why couldn't He? Well, how do you address a group of people who would dance drunk around a golden calf? That's what He was dealing with. In the later books in the Old Testament, when they multiplied the rules and regulations, if you read what they were doing...!

Today I was reading Rabbi Hertz' comments on verses in Hosea—he a Jew himself, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire—he said that the things that some of the Jews were doing in those days, in harmony with the Canaanites around them, were absolutely bestial. What they were doing in sacrificing their children, and so on. It is incredible that God's own people were doing this. Now how do you deal with them? The Sermon on the Mount? No—He leaned on them, because it was necessary. "Why then the law? It was added because of transgression."

. . .No one suggests anything had to be done to change Christ. They've split the Trinity. And I think to drive wedges between the members of the Trinity is a most fundamental (to use terms

that are used by others) heresy. That's unchristian. That's unbiblical. I believe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal, co-eternal, equally knowledgeable, equally loving, equally approachable...

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission"... in Hebrews, where it's stated, if one reads the whole section, one notices the considerable use of Jeremiah. As the law required, there were all the sacrifices, for "without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin"—but they never stopped to think of the meaning. But what God really wants is not sacrifice at all. Remember there in Jeremiah—it's marvelous—that what He wants is you, and He wants to write His law of love on your minds and on your hearts, so he really can be your God and you can be His people. That's what He wants! And so He sent His Son, who said, "I've come to obey the Law, I've come to be an example of what it means to keep the Law." I think that should send us back from Hebrews to Jeremiah: what is it that led the apostle to say this? God in Jeremiah says, "At first when I brought you out of Egypt I didn't give you all those things. I just said let me be your God, and you be my people. But you were so stubborn I had to use these other measures. I had you build the Tabernacle, and I had you build the sacred box, but someday when you have pastors who will give you the truth (Jeremiah 3), you won't remember the box, you'll never make another one, it'll never come to mind, because you'll really know me then, and I'll have written my Law in your hearts and in your minds, and I'll be your God and you'll be my people. And if you're worried about forgiveness—of course I've forgiven you. That Jeremiah 31 is marvelous, and forgiveness is tacked on to the end. The least problem for God is to forgive. But to get His Law in our minds and hearts has been a terribly difficult problem. . .

Then it had to be clarified and demonstrated that to obey God for the wrong reason can turn us into His enemies. That had to be shown—and God's way is not to say it will be that way but to show it will be that way. The death of Christ made that plain—shockingly plain to the onlooking universe. And so the seeds of distrust and rebelliousness were eliminated from the universe. Of course, there was no distrust, no rebelliousness, among the loyal ones. He was confirming their trust. . .

But when it comes to us down here, the same truth that confirms the trust of the universe—and will keep it secure for eternity—is exactly the same truth that we need to come back to trust him, to stop rebelling, and become willing to listen. It's the same truth, it's the same gospel—the angels need the gospel just as we do. Except we need it more, because we have distrusted, we have rebelled. So God dealt with sin: He sent His Son to do away with sin. The forensic says He sent His Son to forgive sin; He sent His Son to pay the price of sin. No, He sent His Son...the Greek is simply "concerning" sin, and there are many translations of course. I love the translation "He sent his Son to do away with sin." Forgiving it, paying for it, remitting it, does not do away with it. {"Why Did Jesus Have to Die?"; Graham Maxwell interview (*Graham Maxwell and Pine Knoll Publications*— 1990)}

Another look at the “many and various ways” in which God has worked to hold His family together as He demonstrates the truth — all in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government.

At infinite cost God has sought to convince the universe that His government will be forever one of peace and freedom based on mutual and well-founded trust. But when Satan plunged the family into the crisis of rebellion and distrust, emergency measures were required to maintain a semblance of order and respect until the basis for real peace and freedom could be clarified and confirmed. God even had to command His children to stop lying, stealing, cheating, and murdering one another. To gain our attention He had to raise His voice on Sinai, rain fire on Mt. Carmel, and send she-bears in Elisha’s day. The One who sees the little sparrow fall had to establish a sacrificial system that called for the death of thousands of His creatures. And the One who is love personified had to set up a system of priestly mediation because His people were either too irreverent or too afraid to be His friends. He even sent His Son to be the One between, when there really is no need for anyone to stand between us and our gracious God. Besides, the One who came is God, and no one stood between Him and Judas as the Creator knelt to wash His betrayer’s dirty feet.

How Satan has sought to pervert the meaning of God’s emergency measures as evidence of the correctness of his charges that God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe! Perhaps Satan’s greatest success has been in leading God’s children to believe that were it not for the constant intercession of His Son, the Father could not find it in His own heart to forgive and heal.

Thank God for the emergency measures! But we must understand them for what they are.

{Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, session 11, “God’s Emergency Measures”, Bible Reference Sheet, recorded April, 1984, Loma Linda, California}

http://www.pineknoll.org/resources/audio/cag/cag_handouts.pdf

IV: At-one-ment and Intercession

As a servant, as a friend, forgiveness, healing

Heavenly Sanctuary

One view sees the plan of salvation and God's gracious provisions, such as the death of Christ on the cross, as being primarily offered to adjust our legal standing in the sight of God. Because as sinners, we are guilty. And guilty as we are, justice and law demand that we be executed. And the only way to avoid being executed—and there are many, various explanations of execution; these are the various views of hell. We all have views of hell, the longer view, the medium view and the shorter view; there are many views of hell. But if God is the executioner, then we do well to be preoccupied with our legal standing. And unless we be forgiven, He will go ahead and do this to us; He must. Law and justice require it. And if He doesn't go through with this, the universe will conclude He is unjust. And if He's unjust, you wouldn't trust Him, and now you're getting over into the other view, which always amuses me, that if you pursue even the legal view logically to its conclusions you wind up with the other one.

But now in the larger view, which uses all 66 books and has no problems with Ellen White at all, it sees sin not as a legal problem. It sees sin as a very real problem that has had devastating consequences on us physically, mentally, spiritually, socially. Sin is a breach of trust, as Romans 14 says. Sin is treachery. Sin is what Lucifer did in the beginning, for which you could not have called him in before a church counsel. I mean, what had he done? Nothing! Except the most devastating thing that can ever be done. Nearly destroyed the universe, that's what he did. That's how bad it was. And because of this distrust, and the consequential unwillingness to listen and allow God to look after us and heal the damage done, enormous damage has been done to sinners. **We're not in legal trouble, we're in trouble. We're not in danger of being executed, we're dying. That's the difference.** And I believe it makes all the difference in the world. I would not go to a doctor who would kill his patients for not cooperating. But if I'm dying, I need a doctor. And if I go and don't cooperate, I still may die. But my understanding is that in this larger view, this great controversy view, this 66 book view, we're all dying. And if God were to leave us alone, that's it.

But He hasn't. He's pursued us through the years, trying to win us back to trust. And of course, you don't expect people to trust without evidence. You don't make claims; you offer demonstrations; that's the content of the 66 books, God's demonstration of the kind of person He is. And the way He's handled this emergency is the greatest demonstration of all. As to, not how He treats His friends, but how He treats His enemies. How He treats the sick and the dying; how does He seek to win them back to trust? And some of us find that very wonderful. **So the purpose of the plan of salvation is not to adjust our legal standing, but the purpose of the**

plan of salvation is to win us back to trust so He can heal us, which He can readily do, and it is to confirm the trust of the on-looking universe. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Questions People Are Asking About the Plan of Salvation, recorded April, 1983, Redlands, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/1MMQUESTP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMQUESTP> (Part 2)*

Now, on the intercession, what about all the pictures of the priests interceding? Isn't this in the Bible? And Jesus says there is no need for it. And since there are hundreds more texts that have intercession going on, and just this one that says there is no need, and we're inclined to go by mathematics, if it's a hundred to one in favor of intercession, we go by that, and ignore this verse. Or read it without the "not" in it, which I've had happen in public places. And it's very interesting! Folk will say, "That verse is my key text for intercession." "And I say to you that I will pray the Father for you." No, that's a verse that says He won't intercede, because there is no need.

Now, when Jesus says something that strongly, and plainly, might that qualify as the "Testimony of Jesus?" That's His testimony about the Father. Do you accept the testimony of Jesus? When we say that we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, that means to accept as true what Jesus came to reveal and to say. Do you accept what He said about this? "There is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you." Does that scare you? If Jesus is not interceding, is not all lost? Why? Because the Father doesn't love us as much as the Son? That's what's implied. But Jesus said the Father does love you as much as I do, and that's why there is no need.

Then why did He give us all the pictures of intercession? Who asked for intercession, at the foot of Sinai? Did Jesus offer it, or did they beg for it? God came to reveal Himself to His children. And He'd already explained how He loves to speak to people face to face, as He speaks to friends. He did it to Moses. And He came to speak to the people, but they were terrified, and they said to Moses, "Don't let God speak to us, lest we die." Remember? "You speak to God. Let Him speak to you. You be the mediator, and the go-between, and the intercessor, and then you speak to us; but don't let God speak to us lest we die."

Because they were so scared, God spoke through Moses to the people. And a whole system was set up. Why? Because God is not loving? Or because we don't trust Him? Because we're scared. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series The Picture of God in All 66 – John, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/57MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/58MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

But if we really want to know about God, what God is really like, then it would mean everything in the world to believe and understand that the One who came to this earth and walked among

us was that God. And so, when Jesus was here, and we realize it's God, and you watch Him treat sinners so graciously, did anybody intercede with Jesus to forgive somebody? No. Nobody had to plead with Him to forgive, ever. It was in His heart to forgive. No one had to plead with Him. But somebody has to plead with the Father, right? If Jesus is fully God, as emphasized in all these passages, and nobody had to intercede with Him, then we know no one has to intercede with God. "In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you". (RSV) "You know, if you've seen Me you've seen the Father. And you realize the implications to this? There's no need for Me to intercede with the Father when I get up there, for the Father's just like Me. In fact, I am God." And Jesus said in John 12:45 and 14:9, both, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. If you trust Me, you trust the Father." And the incredible thing is that that gentle Person who walked around Palestine the way He did, and was so incredibly gracious, even to the one who would betray Him in the end; He was fully God. And that's the way God treats people. And don't wonder if the One up there is still learning how to behave as graciously as the Son. That's a terrible thing to think about! {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series The Picture of God in All 66 – Ephesians and Colossians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/67MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/68MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

[Hebrews 4:14] "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Does this seem to suggest that one Member of the Godhead became a Human to learn what it's like to be tempted, and was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin"? So now, with that experience, He's able to go back and sit at the right hand of God, and be our Friend in court, and speak in our behalf, because He is able to be much more sympathetic than the Father or the Holy Spirit? Doesn't it sound like that, right off? Then there is need for the Son to be in Heaven, interceding with the Father in our behalf, because the Father is not as sympathetic. He just doesn't know. And we should stop speaking of the omniscience of the Father because there are some things the Father doesn't know, but the Son does. And this doesn't sound good at all. So let's back up and go down another line.

How did Jesus become a "merciful and faithful High Priest", and we can now approach with confidence, because He has become such? Do you see how one could take these verses and build quite a picture? That now the Son has come, and learned how hard it is to be good; the Trinity never knew how hard we folks suffer. I mean, how very difficult it is to be good. But now, one Member is up there. And when the Father, in the judgment, looks at Brother Jones'

case, and says, "Out! Out! Not a chance!" The Son says, "Wait a minute, Father. Let Me speak a word in Jones' behalf. You don't know how hard that man tried to be good. It's very difficult. I went down and learned. We had no idea, Father, how difficult it was, how much we're asking these people to do. And I say, please, Father, forgive. Remember I died for this man." And the Father says, "Well, it doesn't make sense to Me, but I change not. I will stay by My agreement. Jones may be admitted. Over My protests, to be sure, but I will stay by My agreement." And the whole thing doesn't sound very good.

And then we remember the gospel of John. And John wrote his gospel years after Hebrews, when a lot of these things had been misunderstood. When the whole idea of priestly intercession had been misunderstood, in a very mechanical manner. And John remembered that Jesus said, in the Upper Room, "Let Me tell you plainly of the Father. There is no need for me to intercede with the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you." Then should we interpret Hebrews 2 and 4 in such a way as to contradict the words of Jesus Himself that there's no need for Him to do this? The next question would be, "Then why does He picture Himself this way?" Why, all through the Bible, has God inspired prophets to picture this priestly intercession when there is no need? That is, there is no need for Jesus to plead with the Father for us. It doesn't say there's no need for the picture. Why have we needed the picture of priestly intercession? Why did we need to have God come down in human form and prove how sympathetic and understanding God is? Jesus said also, remember, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. The Father is just as merciful and faithful as I am." Should we interpret these two passages to contradict John 12 and John 14, when Jesus plainly said these words: "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father"? Then Ellen White comes along and says, "If the Father had come instead of the Son, history would not have been one wit different."

Now, how do we put all those together? Or should we pick the ones we like, and build a model on those, and say we don't know what to do with the others? Or should we build a model that could incorporate it all? Does Hebrews help us understand why God came as an Angel to angels, as a Man to men; and then pictures the Son back in Heaven experienced now? He knows what it's like to be tempted. And we just know up there, at least one Member of the Godhead understands.

Of course, would the Godhead like us to understand one thing more, that really there's no need, as far as They're concerned, for this to be done? They did it because we needed it, not because They needed it. That would make the difference, perhaps. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series *The Picture of God in All 66 – Hebrews*, recorded July, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/73MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/74MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Several points would have to be established first off. It is often said that the New Testament speaks of propitiation. There is no such word. The word translated propitiation is "*hilasterion*." What is the *hilasterion*? And one needs to trace the history. And one needs to do that with every term. Because, you see, terms, words are symbols of ideas. Reading is bringing meaning to those symbols, and we bring our own meaning to them. That doesn't mean it's necessarily right, so we have to check it out. Take the word *hilasterion*; where did that come from? Literally, it means a place or means of reconciliation. But it's the history of it that's more significant. When Moses was told to build the Ark of the Covenant, he was told to take gold and make... a mercy seat? That was totally made up by Luther. He was told to make a lid; to make a cover. And the Hebrew word appears when you hear about the Jews celebrating Yom Kippur. Kippur is the form of the verb "to cover". It strictly is "the day of the lid." And Jewish scholars will agree to that; it's the day of the lid. Now, it was no ordinary lid. There was this cover, that's all the word means, *kaphar*, to cover. Kippur is the form, Yom Kippur, the day of the covering. This lid was between the Shekinah above, representing the presence of God, and the law beneath, God's emergency statement of what He wants of people, though it lists things, none of which can be commanded. It's an emergency measure. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. If thou doest not, I will break thine arm. You cannot command love. And Ellen White says love cannot be commanded. So obviously God is using an emergency measure here. And so the law is yes, very serious, God gave it. And defines sin as lawlessness, a rebellious attitude toward those things. Well, later on, when the Jews were scattered from Palestine, and there were more Jews in Alexandria, in Egypt, than there were in Palestine, they began to speak Greek. And so the Old Testament, which was all there was then, was translated into Greek. And there's the story of 70 scholars put in 70 caves, and they came out with 70 translations that were all identical, which proved that it was an inspired translation (wouldn't you like to own one of those) and it's called the gospel according to the testament of the 70; that's the Septuagint. That's how it got its name.

Well, when they came to the cover of the ark, the lid, they didn't choose the Greek word for lid, because that lid had come to mean some very important things, because that's where the High Priest went, and you remember all the very solemn things that occurred in there. And so those scholars chose the Greek word *hilasterion*. But it was a place where that "*hilast*", whatever that means, took place. Now when Luther came to this word, he thought of the meaning of that lid, and he made up, in old German, it looks odd now, "gnad" and then "stul", now it's "Gnaden Stuhl"; it's the seat of mercy. And Tyndale was an admirer of Luther, and he brought Gnaden Stuhl over into English – Mercy seat. God never said anything to Moses about a mercy seat; He said just make a lid. And then these meanings began to accumulate. Now to round out the whole thing, when Paul wanted to show what it meant for Jesus to die, he said God showed His Son publicly dying as a - lid of the ark. And some versions say "a mercy seat". And that's not bad, because it leads one to remember all that happened there, in the Most Holy

place. Others have a sacrifice of atonement. Propitiation is the least acceptable one imaginable, because propitiation means appeasement; He died to appease the Father. Now that is reading one's theology into the term. Now everybody has a right to read his theology into a term; it doesn't make it right. We then have to equate it with the rest of scripture. Did Jesus die to appease His Father's wrath? You remember what I read from the *Bible Dictionary*. That doesn't mean it's right, because it's in the *Bible Dictionary*. But it was very strongly opposed to it. The *Commentary* used to be opposed to it, but it was changed in favor of it. Now it may go back the other way. That ought to set us free to think it through for ourselves. As Paul says, who are we to condemn anybody else? Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Personally, I would categorically, absolutely, in my own theology, reject the word propitiation.

Now, Ellen White. She uses every one of them. They were part of the language of theology, and she used them. So to get her understanding, you have to read her widely, the same way as you read the Bible, and see how she employed a great variety of terms, and see what consistency comes through in it all. And the thought of appeasing the Father's wrath is absolutely reprehensible to Ellen White. His wrath did not need to be appeased; He did not need to be changed, as I read her. That's just that one word though, propitiation. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Atonement and Your Picture of God*, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)*

"I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself." Goodspeed translates this passage, "I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself."

As friends of a friendly God, the disciples were encouraged to present their own requests directly to the Father. It was not necessary for Jesus to do this for them.

They were, however, to "ask in my name," Jesus said. This was not to suggest that if God did not hear the name of his Son, He would be less willing to grant requests. The mention of the name of Jesus expresses grateful recognition that if the Son of God had not shown us the truth about His Father, we would not know how we could approach Him. We might not even want to.

In this sense, we have indeed needed someone to "mediate," to "intercede," to "intervene," all Latin-based words meaning respectively "to be in the middle," "to go between," "to come between." Every time we pray in Jesus' name, we thank God for Christ our Mediator, who came to bridge the gap between us and God and bring us the truth about our loving Heavenly Father.

Because of Jesus, we know that we can talk with our Heavenly Father "as one speaks with a friend." There is no need for some other friend between, for God Himself is our Friend.

Of all that Jesus might have made plain about his Father, why did He choose this particular information, and why at this moment just before His crucifixion? Was this something the disciples would especially need to remember as they witnessed the events of the next few hours? Was it something the disciples needed to know very clearly, lest they misunderstand the meaning of His sacrificial death? {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, pp. 76-77. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.} <http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter6.html>

The idea that sin should be understood as a breach of faith, a breakdown of trust, is not of primary concern to servants—that is, to servants as Jesus depicted them in John 15:15.

Servants, he explained to his disciples, “do not know their master’s business.” They feel it is none of their business to understand what their master is doing. Their duty is to do what they’re told, and obey the rules—whether they agree with them or not.

Believers who think and act like such servants tend to be preoccupied with their legal standing with their Lord and Master, how to please him, and how to stay out of trouble. Sin is seen primarily as the breaking of the rules.

It is their understanding that by committing such transgression they will incur the wrath of God and find themselves in serious legal trouble. Unless something is done to remove their guilt, legal penalties will be imposed. And for the slightest infraction of the rules, the penalty is nothing less than painful execution or even eternal torture.

Some servant-believers are so accustomed to this kind of government that they fervently defend it, all in the name of justice, as they understand that term. They will concede that in civilized courts of law, justice never justifies torture. But in God’s government?

“Well,” the servant says, “who are you to question his inscrutable ways? As a good and faithful servant, just bow your head and believe. Such fearsome treatment at the hands of God is not only the right but also the loving thing to do.”

I heard someone say this again just the other day. He was the kind of believer who surely qualifies as a “good and faithful servant.”

“God,” he went on to explain, “is required by law, by justice, and by the holiness of his own character and government, not only to destroy those who oppose his will, but first to painfully punish them for an appropriate length of time.”

When I asked him how he could consider such inhuman punishment the loving thing to do, he replied, “Don’t you believe the Scriptures? The Bible says God is love. That means that even if it doesn’t make sense to us, anything God does must be the loving thing to do.” It made me think again of that famous bumper sticker (“God said it! I believe it! That settles it!”).

“Your God is Too Kind”

I have heard servants sometimes charge that friends lack a keen sense of justice. They do not leave room in their understanding of God for just and essential punishment. Their God is simply too weak and kind. “You have a marshmallow God,” I heard one servant say.

The truth is precisely the opposite. Friend-believers have great concern about righteousness, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word often translated “justice.” The English word “justice” comes from the Latin translation of the Greek. (Latin “*justitia*”)

Friends admire God’s righteousness and would love to be like him. And to do what is right is, of course, to do what is just. But servants tend to think of justice in terms of retribution and punishment. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, pp. 108-109. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.} <http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter8.html>

To me the best approach to an investigative judgment is to read through the Bible and see how often God talked with His family. They watched during creation week and were pleased with what they saw. He bore long with the debates and the discussions back in eternity, as He allowed the angels freedom to listen to Satan’s charges, and so on. And Ellen White speaks of Christ serving as mediator during all of that, that He mediated even to sinless beings throughout the universe. He’s always been the bridge-builder in all this kind of thing. There’s always been this debate and this freedom to ask questions and seek information.

When you come to Job 1 and 2, it’s so clear that the family is together and God is saying, “Consider Job.” Now who is the accuser? And who is the defender? In the book of Revelation, who is the accuser who accuses us day and night before God? And who is the one who speaks in our behalf? Then, before you look at Daniel 8:14, say, then read in *Prophets and Kings* the story of Joshua, the High Priest. And then you look in *Great Controversy*, the chapter entitled “The Investigative Judgment”, and it’s not a legalistic thing at all. It’s just that for the last time God convenes the Heavenly family to answer any questions that may remain. And you know that He would allow the adversary to level any charges he wishes. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Atonement and Your Picture of God*, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

Look, for example, at Hebrews 10. Did you feel if you had time to reread it on this occasion that it was like reading the Old Testament through, in the light of the gospels, and some of Paul’s explanations? Isn’t it, really? All the way through? Let’s start this way, just for a few minutes. Would you agree, with recollection of the Old Testament books, and then what Jesus said in the gospels, all God has really ever asked of us is trust. And Paul said the same. Because if He has genuine, honest trust, without cheating, there’s nothing He cannot do for us. And He’s only too willing, and certainly well able to heal all the damage done. Not just to forgive. But He can’t do

it without trust. What is the basis for our trusting God, as we look back? The enemy has accused Him of not being worthy of our trust. Well, Hebrews 1 and 2 says when you think of the many and various ways in which God has spoken to us through the prophets, that's the whole thirty-nine books, is there evidence there that God can be trusted? And then in these last days He sent His Son. How about the four Gospels? Can He be trusted? And He even came in human form so He could clarify things to us. And it involved His death, and so on, in Hebrews 1 and 2, and shortly thereafter. Is that not all evidence that leads us to trust in God?

Now, the whole Old Testament system was given to Israel to help point this out, in many and various ways. It wasn't the only way. And it was a way that was very much adapted to the culture in which they lived. Archaeologists have dug up similar temples and tabernacles, and priests with vestments, and so on. God gave them something they could understand.

It's not a videotape of what's going on in Heaven. It is definitely is a very much adapted representation that would help us at least to realize that sin leads to death, and that there is a provision that God has made, for there He is, represented by the Shekinah. And all those ceremonies suggested there is a forgiving God. But I must take my sins seriously, and I must be honest about it and confess it. I doubt they read a great deal more into it than that. Some didn't read that into it. Pretty soon they came to think of the sacrifice as just a means of winning the favor of this God they were so afraid of, and thought maybe someday would even blot out Moses, and they were amazed whenever he reappeared.

But some of the prophets got the point. Think how many prophets said, "God does not desire all those sacrifices." Jeremiah says, "You know, when God brought us out of Egypt, He said nothing about sacrifices. He just said, 'Let Me be your God, and you be My people; and we can do good things together, and I'll take you to Canaan. But I had to add all these other things because you needed them.'" I understand the whole Old Testament system was pointing in the direction of what God wanted, and the prophets saw it. Now the fact that it failed with so many, with most, is not the fault of the system; because some saw it. David finally saw it. He said, "I realize what You want is truth in the inner man. I'll never offer another sacrifice." Remember the fifty-first Psalm? He says, "I'll go back and offer those sacrifices, but in the right way now. I realize what they point forward to, and what they represent."

Now that Old Testament system only helped if it was thought about, if it was understood as the prophets understood it, if it led people to repentance and to faith and a willingness to listen. I believe the same is true of the cross, and the Heavenly Sanctuary. If watching Jesus die, and if considering His ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, does not lead us to what Micah says in 6:6 and Hosea says in 6:6 and Amos says and Isaiah says and Jeremiah says, and David said in the fifty-first Psalm, if the whole system and the actual dying of Jesus, and what He's doing now, does not lead to truth in the inner man, to repentance, and conversion, and rebirth, and a willingness to listen and a constant trust, then it is of absolutely no avail to us at all. And

Hebrews spells this out in such specific terms, in addition to the eleventh chapter. Look at ten, reading from the beginning. Just quickly:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, [now what good things? More symbols, but upstairs? No] instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? [If they had worked.] If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. [But they still did.] But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. [That's what it was for—a reminder of sin, and hopefully of its remedy.] For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. [Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said], "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God, [that has to do with the way one lives,] as it is written of me in the roll of the book.'"

{Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 - Hebrews, recorded July, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/73MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/74MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Recommend Audio Resource: <http://pkp.cc/hebrews>

V: Prodigal Son Story

Well, in the light of the Great Controversy, we need to look at the other important things in this book. What about the Prodigal Son's story? That's Luke, isn't it? What does that tell us about God, that is of great consequence in the Great Controversy? You remember the charges are that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe, and has said, "Either love and obey Me or I'll kill you." And Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son. As you understand that whole story, when did the father forgive his son? Was it when he finished the speech of repentance? Because that's the proper order, isn't it? We repent, we confess, then He forgives. Did the father think, "Well, that was a very fine and genuine speech of repentance and confession? I think I'll forgive him." When do you think the father forgave the son?

Audience: Before he left home.

Before he left home! Maybe he helped him pack his bags. Because he loved his son. And I think if this story teaches us anything, it is that God is forgiveness personified. He's always forgiving. I believe Lucifer dies in the presence of the One who created him, who will look on him with forgiveness, but the devil does not appreciate it. He's turned this down. The kindness of God has not led Satan to repentance; Romans 2:4. It has led others of us to repentance. God is not two-faced. He always looks on His children with love and forgiveness, but it can be turned down.

What do you think, though, of the boy coming home? What led him home? Did he know his father very well? Not that well, or he wouldn't have planned that speech, or offered to make that deal. He did offer to make a deal with his father, didn't he? And he was going to make this fine speech, not to minimize that. There's only one thing we can really be sure of, about the prodigal son; is, he knew it was nicer at home than in the pigpen. That's all he was sure of, as he looked at the food, and he thought, "My! The servants in my father's house do better than this. I think I'll go home. But as I know my dad, I'm going to make quite a speech when I get to the front door, and I'm going to make quite an offer." Did the father let him finish that speech? No, he got part way into it, and the father was thrilled. In fact, he'd been looking down that road ever since he left. When he saw the son, he threw his arms around him and rushed him home and cleaned him up, and then explained that because he had been so ungrateful and so untrustworthy, from now on he would occupy a lesser position in the family?

No! That ring meant that he had full and equal authority in the family, which was very offensive to the older brother. For the older brother was quite a legalist, who thought that the longer you served, the more you should be rewarded. And the father said, "Haven't you enjoyed being with me all this time?" Suggesting that the greatest reward we ever have is to be with our heavenly Father, if we really like Him. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The

Picture of God in all 66 – Luke, recorded April, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/55MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/56MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

One of the Lord's most memorable parables was about atonement—in the original sense of that word. Jesus told about a son who wasted his life and his share of his father's estate in riotous self-indulgence. Now penniless and starving, he found employment looking after swine.

As he languished there in the pigsty, he began to remember how good it had been at home and wondered if there might be any way to persuade his offended father to let him come back.

His thoughts might have been very different had he known that his father had long been looking down the road, hoping to catch a glimpse of his son coming home. Unfortunately, the son didn't know his father very well.

He began to think of ways to persuade his father to let him in when he arrived at the door. His father could well be very angry with him. Perhaps he should look for his mother first, and she could help persuade his father to forgive and let him have another chance.

And then there was all that money he'd wasted. He would have to find some way to make amends.

"I know what I'll do," the son decided. "I'll ask him to treat me as one of his hired servants." With that, he started out on his way home, practicing his speech as he went.

Had he looked up, he might have noticed his father still watching for him down that road. "But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him.

"The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Fetch a robe, the best we have, and put it on him . . . and let us celebrate with a feast. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.'"

At last the son had learned the truth about his father. He didn't even have to finish that speech. His father had forgiven him long before. But he had to come home to find that out. Now his father's forgiveness led him to real repentance.

As the prodigal stood there in his father's arms, he began to experience the original meaning of atonement.

Servants understand atonement as making amends.

Friends understand atonement as making friends. {Maxwell, Graham. *Servants or Friends*, pp. 166-68. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992.}

<http://www.pineknoll.org/graham/sof/chapter12.html>

So I believe that God's people, wherever they are, on this planet, in whatever church, or no church, or wherever they are in the universe, God's church, His true people, are those individuals who, in the highest sense of freedom have decided that they love, trust, and admire that kind of God. And then there is a unity among them, no matter what happens. And that unity will last forever, because it wasn't contrived in the first place. It wasn't forced in the first place. Are you willing to let God run His universe this way? Well, the only safe way is if He says, "I weep over this, but I cannot let any of you into this kind of society who cannot be trusted." Well, you say, "I've been forgiven, haven't I?" What's forgiveness got to do with it? Where do we get so pre-occupied with forgiveness? We are preoccupied with forgiveness if our understanding is, "God says, 'You break My rules, justice demands that I kill you. But I will give you a chance. Accept this and I'll forgive you.'" And I say, "Please, I accept this." And I'm forgiven. Good. Now He won't have to kill me.

Oh, that may be for little children, but it's not for adults. And you can't turn people like that free, in a free universe. That conception of God and that preoccupation with forgiveness does not indicate a readiness at all. Our preoccupation should be with whether or not we really are safe to save. I mean, could we really be trusted? So David says, "I've tried everything all my life. I've killed lots of animals." Remember when he brought the Ark back? Lots of sacrifices. He says, "I realize now, if I sacrificed my own son, it would have nothing to do with what needs to be done. I realize now that what you want is truth in the inner man. Please give me a new heart and a right spirit."

Now, some say, "Yes, but Paul cleared this all up. What you need most is forgiveness." No, I don't see that at all! I see Paul agreeing with Jesus in His words to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, unless you be forgiven ... ?" No! "Unless you be born again, you'll not see the kingdom." That's all there is to it. Now, I think that the message of forgiveness is only part of the revelation of the truth about God. **The truth about forgiveness is that God is forgiveness personified.** God doesn't forgive us in response to an adequate speech of repentance and confession. And that's why Jesus told the Prodigal Son story. When did the father forgive the prodigal son? Even as he helped him pack his bags to leave. And the greatest discovery the prodigal son made was, half way through his speech of repentance, that his father had long since forgiven him. The message of forgiveness is simply part of the revelation of the truth about God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 - Ephesians & Colossians*, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/67MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/68MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

When the Son of God explained how to be saved, he told stories like the prodigal son. **And the picture of God is not a god who has all kinds of legal problems here, who has to be interceded with, but a God who's looking down the road every day for his son to come home.** Now he couldn't force him to come home. He just hoped his son, while sitting with the pigs, having squandered his living with prostitutes and drinking, that his son would remember enough about his father that he might feel it would be safe to come home, and that his father wouldn't insult him too much, and humiliate him. Even so, the son didn't know his father as well as he should, because he was planning on the way home, "I'm going to promise my father this, and I'm going to promise him that, you know, and I'm going to tell him all that before he has a chance to say anything to me, and gives expression to his anger, because I really deserve it. I really let him down." And I think it's marvelous that when the Son of God told the story, he didn't even let the son finish his speech. I don't think he promised anything, did he? He just cut him right off in the middle. "Son," he says, "we don't have any time for that. I'm so thrilled to have you home." And he threw that big party because he felt so good about it.

That's how God feels about us. And that's all we have to do to be saved. To remember how trustworthy and gracious our Heavenly Father is. The prodigal son's father had forgiven him years before. It's just the son didn't know it, and couldn't believe it. And even on the way home he couldn't believe it completely. He hoped it might be true. But when he got home he found it was true. And Jesus said, "So it is with my Heavenly Father." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Galatians, part 2, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/2MMGALATIANS66>

VI: At-one-ment: Restoration of Relationship, Healing the Damage of Sin

In the *King James* it says: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Well, don’t underestimate that. In the Greek there’s only one word for “belief” or “faith” or “trust” or “confidence”. It’s always the same. And so to go to all the effort we sometimes do to show the difference between belief and faith is interesting in English, but it doesn’t work in the Greek. There is only one word. So what Paul said was, “Trust in the Lord. Have confidence in the Lord. Place your faith in the Lord”. Or “believe.” They’re all exactly the same.

Is that enough? If you only have a minute, is that enough? Of course it depends what we take faith to mean. This is no idle opinion. Faith means a whole attitude toward the One in whom you place your trust, implying a willingness to listen, love, and admire, and so on. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts*, recorded April, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:* <http://pkp.cc/59MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/60MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

God loves to defend His children if there’s anything to defend. Does God defend us because we’re perfect? Or because we trust Him? Because if we trust Him, that means our whole hearts have been changed. We have new hearts and right spirits. We’re willing to listen. We’re sick. “What must I do to be saved?” He says, “Trust Me. But I mean *really* trust Me.” And the thief on the cross died, and that’s all. He trusted. And he arises, trusting. And he’ll need lots of work in the hereafter, but he’s a disciple, he’s a pupil, he’s willing to listen.

No wonder Jesus said to Nicodemus, “If you’re not born again you won’t be saved.” He didn’t discuss a lot of complicated theology. He said, “If you don’t have the experience of Psalm 51, a new heart and a right spirit, and truth in the inner man, I can’t save you. I just can’t. In fact, I won’t. Because you wouldn’t be safe to have around. And I guarantee to My trusting children, they will be safe and free for eternity. So I won’t, much as I love you. I will not let you in. I can’t. Not that there’ll be anything arbitrary about this. If I were to let you in, the glory of Him who is love will consume you anyway. You couldn’t live in it. You’re out of harmony.”

There’s nothing arbitrary about this trust thing. There’s no other way we can live with each other and in the presence of God for eternity, and be safe and free. It *is* the only way.

So the remedy then to the struggle is to realize the Physician that we deal with. He doesn’t condemn us; if we’d only trust Him, he can heal the damage done. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series *The Picture of God in All 66 – Romans*, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/61MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/62MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

How you define faith and trust enters into this. And we need to read other places. **To me, faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a person well known; and we get to know Him through the gospel. The good news is about God, that He is infinitely worthy of our trust. It implies an attitude toward God of love, and trust, and deepest admiration.** It means having enough confidence in God, based upon the more than adequate evidence, all summed up in the good news, to be willing to believe what God says—as soon as we're sure *He* said it! And to accept what God offers, as soon as we're sure *He's* offering it, and to do whatever God wishes, without reservation, as soon as we're sure *He's* asking us, and not somebody else. Anybody who has such a trusting relationship with God, of love, trust, and admiration, willing to listen, is perfectly safe to save.

He could die just beginning that relationship, like the thief on the cross. He would arise loving, trusting, and admiring that kind One in the middle. He will be willing to listen, and accept all kinds of instruction and correction. He is therefore safe to save. But you can't regard God in that attitude without a new heart and a right spirit. So you are a new creature, which he's going to mention in a moment.

And that's what David eventually wanted—truth and honesty in the inner man. Mention honesty, and you remember Micah, Amos, Hosea, they all talked about this. All God asks of us is that we stand humbly in His presence with an honest willingness to listen, and let Him do for us whatever needs to be done.

I would add that even though with the passing of time I'm finding more and more that everything God has asked us to do makes such good sense and I agree with Him; I would have to say that being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I'm willing to obey this trustworthy God when He instructs me to do something beyond my present understanding.

Wouldn't that be safe? Because He's proved always to make such good sense in every other respect. And I think that's what Abraham said to Him. "God, You've always made such good sense. But Your command to sacrifice the son of the promise makes no sense to me. But I know it will. So God, I'm on my way." I believe faith says to God, "God, I hear You, and I've checked that carefully. It is You. And I am on my way. But as I go, in all reverence, may I ask why?" And that's how we come to know God. And for three days and three nights Abraham thought that through; and in the end he said, "God, I'm even beginning to think of ways in which You could work this out. I'm not telling You how, but I know You will; because You'll not contradict Yourself in the promise You gave me about my son. Maybe You'll resurrect my son. Just as You gave him miraculously, You could easily resurrect him. Or maybe You'll provide a substitute." And that's what God chose to do. And Abraham is cited in Hebrews 11 as one who trusted God, but thought it through. Faith is not blind. You can jump off a cliff if you take leaps in the dark, and call that faith. It is not safe. History is strewn with the wreckage of people who leap in the dark and call it faith. Light makes faith possible, and without it we ought to wait. {Graham

Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians*, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>

You see, God is not concerned about our sinful past, He's only concerned about the kind of people we are now. And if I were an angel, I wouldn't be concerned with whether or not God had forgiven Idi Amin; I'd want to know if it was safe to live next door to Idi Amin. When the prophet Isaiah meets King Manasseh in the hereafter, and he's innocently carrying a pruning hook or something to prune his vines; the last time he held one in his hands he was sawing poor Isaiah in half in a hollow log. And will God say, "Well don't worry about him carrying that saw, I forgave him." That wouldn't reassure me at all; I'd want to know if he could be trusted with a sharp saw. And that's why Jesus said to Nicodemus not unless ye be forgiven? No, He said, "Not unless you be born again." It's a healing ministry; new hearts, right spirits. David finally got the message and said, "Sacrifices won't do it, I need a new heart, I need a right spirit, I need truth in the inner man." Now he didn't say, "I'll stop offering sacrifices" because Christ hadn't yet come. But he says, "I'm going to start offering them for a different reason now." As Hebrews says, all the sacrifices were a constant reminder of sin, and that sin leads to death. He says, "I'll go on doing that." But no more were they sacrifices to propitiate the wrath of God, and things like that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series - *Atonement and Your Picture of God*, recorded May, 1993, San Diego, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/1MMAANDP> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/2MMAANDP> (Part 2)

"The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man, would not only make heaven accessible to men [for which we're grateful for sure] but before all the universe it would justify God and His son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin". Calvary tells us much about all those things: the character of God, sin, death, the character of the devil - all these things. Do we learn as much from anything else as we learn about the death of Christ on Calvary?

Now this revelation reconciles some of us, if we so choose. Another word for reconcile is atone, which is a more difficult word. We can understand reconciliation – We've been hostile, we've been enemies of God, and He has reconciled us back to love and trust. But, a synonym for reconciliation is atonement. The trouble is we often use atonement in a rather limited way, as something involved in paying the penalty for sin. I'm not saying that is wrong. But sometimes we make reconciliation easy to understand, and atone very difficult to understand. And basically, they mean exactly the same thing.

Look at Romans 5:11, coming up next time. Now if you have the *King James*, you're going to find the word atonement in here, if you have another version it might not be there. I'm reading

from the *Revised Standard*, and it's not here: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received. . ." Some of you have the *King James*?) Do you have "the atonement?" If so, what do you have in the margin? Is there a number 1 in the margin that says "or reconciliation"? You see, the committee recognized this. It's the regular word for reconciliation. The words mean the same. Atonement is a made up word (at-one-ment). We've been separated, and now we're reconciled into unity again - atonement.

Sometimes that word is "propitiation" in Romans 3, that when Jesus died He became our propitiation. Some have expiation and some have atonement, or sacrifice of atonement. It's not too bad if you understand atonement as reconciliation because the Greek word, I believe, means most particularly a place or means of reconciliation and atonement. But, what kind of atonement is God concerned with? Isn't He concerned about His estranged, wandering, unbelieving, untrusting, misbehaving children? He wants to win us back, to reconcile us. Well, if we'll only trust God, He can heal us, and He would like to save all His children. Or, does atonement have a more exotic meaning than that, dealing with other problems?

Ellen White heard many theologians in her day arguing about the meaning of the atonement. Of course, we do well to study it all we can, but it led her to make this comment, which is the last thing I read last night. This is in the *Bible Commentary* and is Ellen White's comment on this verse, Romans 5:11 – Here are her words: "The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned. [That's often explained like that, isn't it? She says it is not just that.] It is divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health." Now that's the atonement. It is the heaven ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and character. So, she shows that the atonement is not only dealing with various legal and judicial problems. It has to do with restoring us to spiritual health. Winning us back to trust in God so He can heal us. When we get to Romans 5:11 a little later, we may need to look at that again. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 4, recorded October, 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/7MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/8MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

VII: At-one-ment Leads to Perfection and Freedom

Some of the religious leaders in Christ's day understood perfection to mean absolute obedience, doing precisely what you are told. And how they worked at being obedient! They multiplied rules and regulations, until they were weighed down with "heavy burdens, hard to bear." Matthew 23:4, RSV.

Jesus tried to lighten their load and to brighten their gloomy faces. See Matthew 6:16-18. But they rejected His kind of perfection and condemned His gracious ways as a violation of the rules.

There is another way to look at perfection, one that brings this high ideal within our reach and shows us how freely it may be attained.

When a sinner sees the truth and is won back to God in faith, God accepts him and assures him that he has not only been forgiven but also will be treated as if he were perfect, as if he had never sinned. This change from hostility to acceptance, from rebelliousness to a willingness to listen, is so great that Jesus told Nicodemus it was like being born again. See John 3:3.

{Maxwell, Graham. *I Want to Be Free*, pp. 56-57, Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1970.}

Remember Romans 13:8, 10, he says love is the fulfilling of the law. The man who loves his neighbor has fulfilled all law. He says the same thing here in Galatians. Well, supposing then we all obeyed the law, and we all loved each other, which would mean we'd never be rude, never arrogant, never insist on having our own way, and so on. Would that be a threat to our freedom? We'd be really free, you see. So if we really understand what the law requires, it's a guarantee of freedom. If God says, "I'll only save people who are committed to the spirit of My law, it means I'll only save people who love one another, and therefore can be trusted, and there will be peace and freedom." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians*, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>*

VIII: Articles

The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence

The Three Most Fundamental Questions in the Great Controversy

“Jesus Talks About Atonement” 1990 sermon, Azure Hills Church, Grand Terrace, California

Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Justification; Set Right with God

THE MOST COSTLY AND CONVINCING EVIDENCE

A Graham Maxwell

Another look at the cross in the larger setting of the Great Controversy over God's character and government, answering the question:
Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Sin as Distrust

The Bible describes sin as more than mere breaking of the rules. Sin involves a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen. Left untreated, sin makes peace impossible. To set and keep things right, trust must somehow be restored. God sent his Son "to deal with sin." Why was it not enough for Jesus simply to tell us the truth about his Father and to demonstrate by his own gracious treatment of the worst of sinners that God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be? Why did Jesus also have to die? Why was there no other way?

The way Jesus suffered and died is the greatest revelation of the truth about God the universe will ever see or ever need. Correctly understood it means defeat for the accuser of our Heavenly Father. No wonder Satan has sought to obscure, even pervert, the meaning of the cross - to his own evil advantage and to our great loss! But why did Jesus have to die?

Christ's Cross God's Answer

Now we have called the cross the most costly and convincing evidence because we believe that the unique and awful way in which Jesus suffered and died reveals something about our God and about his government that absolutely had to be clarified before trust and peace could be restored again. For there has been a crisis of distrust in God's universal family—even to the point of war up in heaven as described in Revelation 12.

God has been accused of being unworthy of the trust of his created beings—of being arbitrary, vengeful, and severe. Particularly has he been accused of lying to his children—lying about death being the result of sin. Now it does no good simply to deny such charges. God does not tempt us to accept mere claims. Even the Devil can make mere claims. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances—particularly difficult ones, can trust be re-established and confirmed.

So the Bible records that God sent his Son to deal with this breakdown of trust and trustworthiness in his family. In other words, he sent his Son to deal with sin. As the Bible describes it, sin is much more than a mere breaking of the rules. Sin is a breakdown of trust or trustworthiness. Sin means a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen-not to mention all the damaging consequences of our being unwilling to listen to our heavenly Father. Jesus came to set right everything that had gone wrong, and to set it right in such a way that it would stay right for the rest of eternity.

What went wrong?

So first of all, let us consider again what has gone wrong because I believe the way we understand what went wrong helps us to understand the methods God has used to set things right. It particularly helps us to understand why Jesus had to die. Our God has been accused, specifically, of being arbitrary, and exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. God sent his Son to reveal the truth about these matters. Why was it not enough for Jesus to come and live among us as he did and tell us the truth about his Father and then demonstrate by his gracious treatment of the worst of sinners that God, indeed, is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be? Of course the way he lived and the way he treated people is vital evidence.

But remember that the most serious charge leveled against our God is that God has lied to us—he lied to us when he said that sin results in death. Worse than that, Satan has turned God’s gracious warning to our first parents in the Garden of Eden into a terrifying threat. He pictures God as saying to Adam and Eve, “Either you obey me, or I’ll kill you!” Think of the baleful effect that perversion of the truth has had on the human race. Think how it has poisoned people’s attitude toward God and their practice of religion. Think of picturing our gracious God as saying, “You either love and obey me, or I’ll torture and execute you in my righteous wrath.” How could this satanic view of God win such wide acceptance as it has? Why is it still so widely believed?

Appeasing God?

For thousands of years men have sacrificed—even their own children—to win the favor of their offended gods. Even in the Christian world it is suggested and even believed, that if it were not for Christ’s appeasement (sometimes called propitiation) of his Father’s wrath, we would long before now have been destroyed. And were it not for Christ’s constant pleading with the Father, God could not find it in his own heart to forgive and heal his children. Who could have thought up such a perversion? But from reading the 66 books of the Bible, does anything need to be done to persuade God to love his children? The testimony of all 66 books is that God has always loved even his most wayward child. That is what is summed up in John 3:16: “God so loved the world ...” (not just his good children, but all his children—both good and bad).

Sin results in death

Those serious words to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were no threat. They were a gracious warning, because sin actually results in death. Sin so changes the sinner that the natural consequence is death. Cut off by his own rebellious choice from the source of life the sinner will die. Now out of harmony with God by his own rebellious rejection, the sinner is so changed that even the life-giving glory of our God becomes to him a consuming fire. How can this best be clarified? Not by claims, but by evidence and demonstration.

One choice that God had was to allow Adam and Eve to die. And he could have said to the universe, “Who is telling the truth? I said sinners would die. It is the Devil who has lied to you”.

Or going back even further, God could have left Satan and his followers to reap the natural results of their sin and they would have perished. Surely then there would have been no question about the truthfulness of God's warning. Why didn't God take those apparently easy choices? He could have saved all the painful history since that time. Of course, had the universe watched Satan and his followers die, having never seen death before, there was the hazard that they would assume that God had executed his children who had displeased him. Then there would be the danger that the angels would serve God from fear. The obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel. And rebelliousness is the essence of sin.

Fear-induced obedience

But God did not take that easy way out. He did not want the obedience and love that spring from fear. That would be totally unacceptable to so gracious a God as we know him to be. Instead, God sent his Son in human form and he died the death that is the natural result of sin. The universe watched and saw how God was involved in the death of the wicked.

Of all the 66 books in the Bible, perhaps Paul in Romans gives the clearest explanation of why Jesus died. First of all he recognizes the truth of God's warning in the Garden of Eden. Look at Rom. 6:23 (Phillips) where Paul agrees with the record in Genesis: "Sin pays its servants: the wage is death." But we also recall Satan's denial and his charge that God had lied in Genesis 3:4, 5 (RSV): "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.'" Notice that Satan subtly adds the additional charge that God is selfishly withholding something that would be for their best good.

Claims or evidence?

Now who is telling us the truth? God, or the great former lightbearer, Lucifer? How do you determine who is telling the truth? Did God gather his family together and say, "I am telling the truth, the Devil is lying!" Which would only encourage the Devil to say, "No, I am telling the truth and God is lying." Matters like this cannot be settled by claims or denials. God's way was to take his case into court. Look at the marvellous words of Romans 3:4 (Goodspeed): "As the scripture says, 'That you may be shown to be right in what you say, and win your case when you go into court.'" The Bible often speaks of such meetings of the heavenly family. Look, for example, in the first two chapters of Job. And if you want to know how many attend, look in the book of Daniel (7:9, 10) where it says a hundred million beings watch as the court meets. Note how God resolves questions particularly of the charges of Satan that are leveled against him and against his friends before the heavenly court. In the book of Job, Satan accused God and he accused Job of being unworthy of God's trust. Did God say, "That's a lie Satan; this man is perfect?" God said, "You've raised a serious question. The only way to answer it is to show you."

Now look at the rest of the book of Job. Did Job show himself to be a trustworthy friend of God? Did he trust God because he was being richly rewarded or did he seem to be utterly abandoned and yet he still trusted God? The book ends with God saying, "Thank you, Job, you've said of Me what is right." Job was God's friend all the way through and God could then

turn to the heavenly court and say, “Do you need any more evidence about the falsity of Satan’s charges and the trustworthiness of my friend Job?”

This is God’s way. God himself has been accused. He does not merely deny the accusation. He says, “Let me show you. My children, let me show you the falsity of these accusations and the truth about myself and then you decide.” Imagine the humility of the Infinite One submitting his character and government to the scrutiny and investigation of his mere creatures! But that’s God’s way, and it is the only way to really establish love and trust in the fullest sense of freedom.

Jesus’ death shows God’s righteousness

So we are told that in the fullness of time “God showed his Son publicly dying as a means of reconciliation [an answer to questions] to be taken advantage of by faith. This [death] was to demonstrate God’s own righteousness. For in his divine forbearance he had apparently overlooked men’s former sins. This death was to show that God himself is righteous and therefore can set right those who have faith in his Son.” I am sure you recognize Romans 3:25, 26—though perhaps not the words that I used. The KJV reads:

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Propitiation?

Now there is a difficult word in there—“propitiation”. Propitiation means appeasement—this is a most regrettable translation. Propitiation is what you husbands may offer your wives when you promised, on your anniversary, to be home at 6 p.m. to take your wife out to dinner and now it’s 11 p.m., and you’ve just remembered. So on the way home you find an all night florist shop and you buy some chocolates and whatever else you can lay your hands on. As you approach the front door with some trepidation, you open it and hand the flowers and the chocolates in, trying to propitiate the righteous wrath of your deeply disappointed wife. That’s propitiation, or appeasement.

It is essential to really analyze that verse. The word translated “propitiation” here is pronounced “*hilasterion*”. That is the word used in the Greek Septuagint for the mercy seat, although the Bible does not mention mercy seat in the Old Testament. Luther made it up. When Luther looked at this word which is used for the cover of the ark—the ark of the covenant—he found that the Hebrew word just means a “covering”. But that covering was so important that he translated it “Mercy Seat”.

Tyndale was a friend of Luther (who first translated it this way in 1524) and in 1525 Tyndale brought it over into English and several versions followed him. That’s where “mercy seat” came from. The cover of the ark was never called mercy seat until the early sixteenth century AD. But

think of the meaning of what happened before the mercy seat—it was not a bad choice. It's just a pity that the *King James Version* uses mercy seat in Exodus and mercy seat in Hebrews 9:5, but does not use mercy seat in Romans 3:25, 26. It uses propitiation. I think mercy seat would have been much closer. For this Greek word means literally “a place or means of reconciliation”—a place where atonement or unity and at-one-ment take place.

So I ventured my own translation of Rom. 3:25, 26. “For God showed him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation to be taken advantage of by faith. This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness, for in his divine forbearance he had apparently overlooked men's former sins. [They hadn't died as he had warned, you see]. It was to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time to show that he himself is righteous and that he sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus.” In other words, Jesus died to answer the questions about his Father and to prove that God was not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be. He had not lied about sin leading to death. He sent his Son to answer the questions.

Watching Jesus die

So in imagination let's go to the cross and watch Jesus die. Did he really die? The soldiers were surprised to find he was already dead. Crucifixion was a slow way of dying. Evidently something else had happened. Is it true that Jesus was dying the death of a sinner—to show us how the sinner really dies? Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 (RSV): “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” He did die the death of a sinner. What caused Jesus to die? As you watch him dying on the cross, is God killing his Son? Is he torturing his Son to death? Is God pouring out his wrath on his Son- something the Bible so often pictures God doing toward sinners for whom there is no further hope?

God's Wrath

Well, it all depends on the meaning of wrath. What is God's wrath? One of the clearest explanations in the whole Bible is in Romans 1. The whole chapter is important, but look at these few verses—Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28 (RSV): “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth ... [and it is the truth about God in that whole section.] Therefore, God gave them up ... For this reason God gave them up ... And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up.” Three times it states in Romans 1 that God's wrath is simply his turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choice.

Was Jesus given up? Look at Romans 4:25 (RSV) – “Jesus our Lord, who was put to death ...” my favourite version says. There is nothing in the Greek that says he was put to death. It says: “Jesus our Lord, who was given up for our trespasses ...” and it uses exactly the same word as in Romans 1:24, 26 & 28. Versions ought to leave them the same to show the point that Jesus died under the wrath of his Father.

But look at the real meaning of God's wrath. This was not new with Paul. It's all through the Old Testament. It is most dramatic in Hosea 11:7, 8 (Phillips): "My people are bent on turning away from me ... [but] How, oh how can I give you up, Ephraim! How, oh how, can I hand you over Israel!"

Did Jesus understand that this is the experience he was passing through? Did Jesus know he was being given up as Hosea describes it? (And Paul later in Romans 1 and 4) What did Jesus cry just before he died? "My God, my God, why are you beating me up? Why are you torturing me? Why are you killing me?" No! "Why have you given me up?" (Matt.27:46) He knew.

Did the Father kill the Son?

We should have come earlier, though—to Gethsemane. For there he began this awesome experience of demonstrating the truth about God's gracious but awful warning—that the wages of sin is death. There Jesus fell to the ground dying. The angels were watching. Was God killing his Son in the Garden of Gethsemane or did Jesus feel his unity with his Father breaking up? He began to feel the awesome loneliness of being given up. Had Jesus been left in the Garden of Gethsemane to die there, could you say that the Father killed the Son? Now had he been a mere creature you wouldn't know; but the angels knew who Jesus was. They knew that he was God. And they knew the meaning of his words in John 10:18 (RSV) where Jesus said, "No one takes it [my life] from me. [No one can. I lay it down of myself.] I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it again".

The angels knew that was the truth. If Jesus died it was not because his Father had killed him. The Father was giving him up and both of them suffered and the Father was crying, "How can I give you up?" The Son who had assumed humanity was the One who died. So two questions were answered in Gethsemane. Is death the result of sin? Indeed it is. Is it because God kills his wayward children? He did not lay a hand on his Son.

Not knowing God

But there was a third question that needed to be answered. Why is it so important that we understand that God does not execute his sinful children? This had to be answered, too. So an angel came to strengthen Jesus to go out to Calvary. There, once again, he answered the first two questions. But he was also this time tortured and crucified. By whom? By the Father? Or by the most devout group of Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-quoting Adventists the world has ever known? They even said he had a devil before they tortured him to death. You see, they obeyed God from fear. Because as the prophet had said so many times before, they did not really know God.

Look at John 19:31 (GNB): "Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday, and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy." You see, they nailed their Saviour to the cross and then rushed home to keep that Sabbath especially holy—to prove they were

God's true people. That's the awful result of serving God from fear because you do not know the truth about God.

The three questions were answered:

1. Does sin result in death? Indeed, it does!
2. But is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God? Indeed, it is not!
3. But what's so dangerous about misunderstanding this and serving God from fear? The service of fear produces the character of a rebel. It can even turn people who are dedicated to obedience into harsh rebels, and God's worst enemies!

Reconciling God to us?

Obviously Jesus did not die to win his Father. How clear Paul is on this. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (RSV) "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Nowhere ever does the Bible suggest that God had to be reconciled to us. Never once! But God paid the price to reconcile us to himself! Nor did Jesus die to pay some mere legal penalty. He died to reveal the truth about God and the falsity of Satan's charges. Even the angels had to learn this. Look at Colossians 1:20 (RSV): "... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace, [not war, but] making peace by the blood of his cross."

As Jesus said in John 12:32 (GNB): "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw everyone to me." Not all men—everyone in the whole family of the universe. You see viewed in the larger setting of the Great Controversy, the way in which Jesus suffered and died is the greatest revelation of the truth about God and his government that the universe will ever see or ever need. Correctly understood, the message of the cross is final defeat for the adversary. No wonder Satan has worked so hard to obscure and misrepresent and even pervert the meaning of the cross.

God's good news

But to some of us the cross is great good news. Yes it is true that sinners will die but we have no need to be afraid of God and he died to prove it. This message has great power to win to repentance and to trust. Paul was so proud of this good news. Look at his understanding of it in the last verses. 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18 (RSV): "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, [What is the Gospel—the good news—about?] and not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ, [that's the Gospel] be emptied of its power. [This good news has great power]. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Now compare with that Romans 1:16 (RSV) that very famous righteousness by faith verse: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: [this good news] it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith ... [Wherein lies the power?] for in it [something is revealed] the righteousness of God is revealed." The good news is that God is not the unrighteous kind of person his enemies have made him out to be.

Confidence in God has been confirmed by the way Jesus suffered and died. Among God's friends whether angels or men this meaning of the cross will have power to hold God's great family together in loyalty and in peace forever.

The Three Most Fundamental Questions in the Great Controversy

I believe that the three most fundamental questions in the great controversy have been:

1. **Did God tell the truth?** Because if not, we can't trust Him.

Did He tell the truth in the beginning, when He said, "This is a free universe. I value nothing higher than your freedom. All I ask is trust and love. But if you prefer to go some other way, it will lead to nothing less than death. It's that serious." Has He told the truth?

But what causes the death?

2. **Does justice demand that God torture His children to death for refusing to love Him?**

. . . You men, . . . did it ever occur to you to take your beloved by the scruff of the neck and say, "Look, you either love me, or I'll kill you. And I won't make it easy. I'll torture you to death! Now, let me try again. Will you be my wife?" Why, wouldn't you ladies run for your lives under those circumstances? Who do you suppose has taught the idea that justice demands that God torture His children to death? It'll be fair. You'll only be tortured as long as you deserve, that's all. Where did that come from? Ellen White says that nothing has turned more millions against God than that idea. Has it been answered? Not in words, but in an actual occasion, did God come and say, "Watch Me die"? Did anybody take His life from Him? He says, "I lay it down of myself." The angels knew that it was God Who was going through this, and it gave them the answer. Yes, death is the result of sin, but it is not torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God.

3. **Why did He want us to understand that? Why is He willing to pay such a supreme price that we may understand that clearly?**

Because, **the obedience that springs from fear**, that He might have said, "Love Me or I'll kill you" **produces the character of a rebel**. And in these last days how stunning to hear Ellen White say that, more than once. And in the little book *That I May Know Him*, page 120, she says, sullen submission produces the character of a rebel. Such a one would sin, and disobey if he dared. But he doesn't dare; he's scared. His rebelliousness is only suppressed, waiting to burst forth at any time in bitterness and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. I'm paraphrasing it, but it's even better than that.

And God demonstrated to the family, “I do not want you to serve Me from fear, because if you do, you’ll not be My friends. You will be my pious, pretentiously pious, enemies. And when My Son comes the second time, you’ll hate Him as those pious Sabbath-keepers hated Him nineteen hundred years ago.” Now why do we obey? Is it clear to us there’s not a streak of arbitrariness in our God? And of all the commandments, the least arbitrary to me is the Seventh-day Sabbath, and I wince if it’s ever described as a mere arbitrary test of obedience. It could leave us vulnerable, just as the Jews were back in these ancient times. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts, recorded April, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/55MMPOGIA66> (Part 1)

<http://pkp.cc/56MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Jesus Talks About Atonement

Graham Maxwell

Azure Hills Church, Grand Terrace, California

January 20, 1990

The title I've chosen for our study and worship this morning is "Jesus Talks About Atonement". And to introduce the subject, you might like to join me in reading Romans 5:10, 11. Paul writes: "We were God's enemies. But He made us His friends through the death of His Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life? But that is not all. We rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God's friends."

Now I'm using the *Good News Bible*, or also known as *Today's English Version*, produced by The American Bible Society not so long ago. In the *King James Version*, if you have it in front of you, this passage ended with, not the words "has now made us God's friends", but "to whom we have the atonement." In the margin it will say "or the reconciliation". In the *King James Version*, this is the only occurrence of the word "atonement" in the whole New Testament.

Every once in a while someone will stop and ask me, "Do you believe in the Atonement?" The easy way to answer that, especially if you're in a hurry, is to say "Yes, indeed, of course I do. It means everything to me." And that may be a very good way to avoid an argument, or even a prolonged sermon on the sidewalk, but it may also be quite misleading. For, as many of you must know, there are several different understandings of the atonement, some of which I believe put God in a very undesirable light. And so, in effect, when you say "Yes, I believe in the atonement," you're saying to this individual, "I agree with your understanding", which may not be true at all.

I recall a long time ago, the first time I was asked if I was a fundamentalist. And I thought as a youth, that has a good ring to it, a fundamentalist; we certainly believe in the fundamentals, and I said yes I was. But later on I found out what he meant by a fundamentalist, and I hastened after him and said, "I'm certainly not one of those". And if you knew his list of the fundamentals, you would agree with me. I recall on a university campus, also a long time ago, standing among a group of graduate theology students, and one said to me, "Do you believe in the supernatural?"

I thought "that's pretty safe; we all believe in the supernatural." But later on I found out what he meant by the supernatural, and I had to pursue him and say "No, I don't believe in that." And then someone asked me once if I was a perfectionist, and that has a good sound to it. Matthew 5:48; "Be ye therefore perfect," I owned up that I was a perfectionist. But later on I had to find that person too and tell him no, I wasn't one of those; not the way he understood perfectionism. So now I've learned to be much more cautious, even if someone asks me, "Are

you a Seventh- day Adventist?" I say, "You tell me what you think one is and I'll tell you if I am one." And sometimes when they're through, I say "I like to call myself a Seventh- day Adventist, but I'm certainly not one of those that you just described."

So when someone says, "Do you believe in the atonement", I'm cautious about that, too. And I ask people, "Tell me what you think the atonement means, and I'll tell you if I do." Of course, when the situation is right, I like to reply, "I believe in the kind of atonement Jesus described." And the reply will come, "But Jesus never talked about the atonement." And I'll agree with them, it's true, Jesus never ever used the word, nor did anyone else in Scripture, including Paul. You see, the Scriptures were written in Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek, and the atonement is a sort of made-up English word. You'll never find it in the original. But though Jesus never used the term, I believe Jesus had a great deal to say about the most important meaning of that famous word. And if you want to find the meaning, settle for nothing less than the multi-volume set of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. That dictionary is so enormous, it makes the *Webster's Unabridged* look like just a pamphlet. And you go through those volumes, and you trace the history of the development of the meaning of the word. And you look up in volume one, "atonement", and it says it's true; it was made up of "at" and "one" and "ment". "Atonement". I read recently that that isn't true. I need to refer that person to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It just seemed too clever to someone that that's where the word came from; that it really means "being at one".

So in that great old dictionary it shows how way back in the 13th century, the word was being used to mean "Being at one. Being in harmony. The opposite of being at odds." And the verb "to atone" means, "To set at one. To unite." There was even a verb back in those early days, pronounced to "one"; "go in one, people." Not win, one, o-n-e. Two children are fighting at home, and the mother comes to "one" them; to restore unity and harmony between the two, so there might be "at-one-ment" and atonement. And it's interesting to watch mothers pursue this kind of "at-one-ment". And she says to the two, "Now you stop fighting right now, and be at one, or I'll severely punish you." And they stop fighting. And mother says, "Say, that system really works. I'll go a little further. Now Billy, you tell your little sister how much you love her, or I'll severely punish you." And you know what? Billy, who's had experience with his mother, will probably say to his little sister, "Sister, I love you." But it'll have a certain hollow sound to it. Have you children, perhaps, ever done that? And then mother warms to her task still further; it really works. "Now Billy, give your sister a kiss, or I'll severely punish you." And little Billy delivers one of those worthless little kisses; can you remember giving those when you were little and you didn't think your sister was at all deserving of it? But you'd better do it, or you'll be in serious trouble. What kind of "at-one-ment" is that? It was produced from fear of mother's threat of getting into serious trouble.

So you go on looking in the dictionary; other dictionaries. "Atonement", the condition of being at one with others. Unity of feeling. See, Billy and his sister didn't have that. They had an "at-

one-ment” of another sort. It was just enforced and imposed harmony, concord, agreement. In other dictionaries, the verb “to atone” means to restore friendly relations between persons who have been at variance. Hence reconciliation, a common biblical term. And then the dictionary goes on to say: “In the realm of religion, atonement means reconciliation or restoration between God and sinners.” And you recall the Scripture I read in Romans 5, “We once were enemies, and now we have become reconciled and become His friends.”

Now, later on, in fact much later on, this word “atonement” came to be used by many in the sense of appeasement; making amends, paying the penalty, to satisfy legal demands. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* observes, if you go this route, the idea of reconciliation or reunion is practically lost sight of, and the meaning is that of legal satisfaction or amends. What an interesting comment in a dictionary. And it’s interesting to inquire how that change developed from the original friendly meaning of atonement. Well, theologians sometimes, even often say, that Jesus never explained the atonement; you have to look to Paul for that. Jesus came rather to offer the atonement and pay the penalty that atoned. Now that’s using atonement in that much later sense, you see; appeasement and propitiation, if you’ll forgive the use of that very difficult Latin term.

Now we sometimes do use atone in the sense of “make amends”, to appease, to propitiate. I mean, what if your husbands came home much too late to take your wife out to dinner, as you had promised to—on your anniversary, no less. And after much effort you have finally at least restored some conversation between you. Your wife hits on a solution. She says, “Husband, you can *atone* for this terrible thing you’ve done, by taking me out to dinner every Monday night for the rest of the year.” Now that’s atonement in the later sense, you see. Hopefully those efforts will result in reconciliation, and peace, and “at-one-ment” between husband and wife. And the unity of “at-one-ment” is the original and the ultimate meaning of atonement.

Now it’s true that Jesus never used those very difficult and often Latin terms that are used to describe the provisions of salvation. In fact, it’s been observed that when Jesus explained salvation, there was no need for anyone to consult the dictionary, or even to consult the learned doctors, as to the meaning of the words that fell from the lips of the greatest teacher who ever lived. And because He so sparingly used those terms, it’s sometimes said He never really discussed the subject. He just did it in very simple terms. Look for example at John 17, part of that memorable prayer that really could be called the Lord’s Prayer; His prayer to His Father. In John 17, starting with verse 20. Having prayed for quite a while, He then goes on to the Father:

I do not pray for these only [these close disciples] but also for those who believe and trust in Me through their words [the message of the disciples] that they may all be one [that’s atonement, that they all may be at one] even as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us.

What does it mean to be “in” somebody? If Jesus is in me, and I’m in Him, and He’s in the Father, and the Father’s in Him, I want to know who is in whom, or if anybody is really “in” anybody. This has been understood to mean by many, “in-ness” in the sense of “in union with” and is even so translated. So close it’s like being in each other. But we’re separate persons. It’s just a word to describe our relationship. We are as one. We are in union with each other. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are as one. There is atonement between the members of the Godhead. And they treat each other as such, outdoing one another in giving honor to each other. That’s the way trusting friends who are at one with each other behave. That’s the ultimate model of atonement, and “at-one-ment”. Let’s pray that we all may be at one, even as They are. “The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become perfectly one.” Now that’s perfect atonement, you see. That’s the real, original and ultimate meaning of this word, atonement, “at-one-ment”. Now, in several places, Jesus explains what it would cost to restore this universe, His family, to “at-one-ment”. He mentions His death. He even uses the term that’s sometimes translated “ransom”. When He says in John 12:32, “If I be lifted up”, thus signifying the way in which He was to die, “if I be lifted up I will draw all unto Me.” Angels and men were all drawn closer into atonement and “at-one-ment”. Without His death it could not be possible.

Now Paul was in full agreement with this understanding. Look at Ephesians 1:9, 10. A passage that mystifies some, for reasons we’ll mention in a moment:

For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite [make us one] all things in Him, all things [where?] things in Heaven and things on earth.

Colossians 1:19, 20 says it even more dramatically, perhaps. Colossians 1:19, 20. And if you’d rather read the whole chapter before coming to this. But just 19 for now:

For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through Him to reconcile [that’s atonement]. For Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in Heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

Now that’s atonement. Peace is the opposite of war. Peace is the opposite of hostility. And you notice it says here it cost the death of Jesus, the meaning of the shedding of His blood, to restore peace and unity and atonement. Now, *how* His death makes possible peace and atonement, is a subject of very great consequence, to which one should devote one’s closest attention. But just to mention one of the many ways in which this is so, is it possible to be at one with someone of whom you’re deathly afraid? Now, in the course of human history, many tyrants have sought to establish unity by means of force and fear. But that kind of unity does

not last. Just look at what has happened in a number of countries in the world in the last few weeks. There was an enforced unity, brought about through fear, and at last the people have risen up to throw off the shackles of fear. And it appears that the unity's breaking up. Those folks are ready to move on to a far greater unity. And hopefully, in this moment of opportunity, we will not go in there with a picture of a tyrannical God who would seek for unity by force and fear. You know, in the vacuum of the moment, many ideas will go in, and we'd better get in there first, with what some of us regard as the great good news about our God.

It is correct though, to speak of Christ's atoning death. His atoning sacrifice. His atoning blood. Of Christ our atonement. But what do you mean by those words? Now, this passage also says it cost the death of Christ to restore peace and "at-one-ment" for the whole universe, and not just for you and me. But tell me, has there ever been a threat to "at-one-ment", even a breach of "at-one-ment" throughout the universe? For those of us who take the book of Revelation seriously, Revelation 12 describes a war that began up in Heaven. And from Genesis to Revelation you can read of the causes and the consequences of that war, and why it cost the sufferings and death of Christ to win that war, and establish peace for the rest of eternity.

For you see, there once was atonement throughout the universe, before the war began. Before there ever was sin in this universe, there was atonement in the original, the first and ultimate meaning of that term. You see, way back in those days, all of God's children trusted each other. All of them trusted their Heavenly Father, and He in turn, could safely trust in them. And where there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness, there's peace, there's harmony, there's atonement, there's "at-one-ment".

But a conflict of distrust arose, even to the point of open rebellion and war. And disunity and disharmony took the place of unity and, shall I say "at-one-ment"? That's atonement. Same thing. That's how sin entered the universe. As 1 John 3:4 defines sin, sin is rebelliousness. That's the meaning of the Greek word there. Or as Paul defines sin in Romans 14:23, sin is a breach of faith. Sin is a breakdown of trust. And where there is no trust, there is no unity, no "at-one-ment". And the plan of salvation all the way to the cross, and ever since the cross, is designed to restore trust, to bring the rebellion to an end. And thus to reestablish "at-one-ment" in the whole universe, in God's entire family. For all were involved. And to reestablish "at-one-ment" in a way that will last forever.

Now, not everyone recognizes that there's been such a conflict in God's family. Even Luther, and I say that even because we think so much of Luther. He's one of our heroes. Think of what he did to turn our attention from man to God and from tradition to the scriptures. And think of the translation he prepared in German that the people could understand. What more could we ask of him? But Luther didn't believe there was such a war. In his commentary on Genesis he says, "Some poor fathers have fancied that there once was a war between the angels." And this

questioning of the idea of the war as merely fanciful was the result of the fact that he did not accept all 66 books of the Bible.

When Luther said “the Bible and the Bible only”, a phrase we so often use—many love to do it in Latin for some strange reason, though few study Latin any more. I studied Latin for six years, so I’ll take the liberty of using it: “Sola scriptura”. Why not in English? “The Bible only”. But when Luther said “the Bible only”, he didn’t mean all 66, he meant only 62. There were four whose apostolic authority and inspiration he seriously questioned. These four were Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. He said of the book of Revelation in his preface, and you can read it, you can see it, he said, “There’s no way the Holy Spirit could have inspired this book. I cannot find Christ in this book. Besides, it’s altogether too difficult to understand.” Now we might agree with his last statement, but not the first two.

But you see, because Luther could not use the book of Revelation as authoritative, he missed the war in Revelation 12. And without the larger understanding of the war that has involved the whole universe, it’s hard to understand Paul’s explanation that Jesus died and shed His blood to bring peace, reconciliation, friendship, unity and atonement to God’s people in Heaven as well as upon the earth. And then it’s hard to understand that the kind of unity God wants is not pertaining just to you and me. But it pertains to His whole divided family, the whole universe. One can take a far larger view of the cross and the plan of salvation and atonement. And it doesn’t minimize the salvation of you and me. It just seems to me to make it a whole lot more sensible and attractive and winsome, and totally unarbitrary to view it in this way.

Now, the kind of unity that God desires cannot be commanded anymore than Billy’s mother could do it. Nor can it be produced by force or fear. Nor can such “at-one-ment” be bought, at any price. You can’t just buy people to be your friends. It can only be won. But we must hasten to add, it did cost everything to win it. The unity and the atonement that God has won and still seeks to win in our individual lives, is described in a colorful way in Ephesians 4, where you recall it says that God’s purpose and the purpose of ministry and the purpose of the church is to bring us to the unity, the oneness, the “at-one-ment”, the atonement, that is inherent, is intrinsic to our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God. That is to say, the atonement that God wants, the unity that He wants, is the oneness that naturally exists among those who love, trust and admire the same Jesus, and the same God.

Now God does not even desire the unity that comes from a mere, blind submission to His supreme authority. And you’d have to admit that He has a perfect right to demand this of us troublesome children. But you remember the incredible offer of Jesus in John 15:15. It’s so important. Would you take a look at that? John 15:15, where Jesus said to His disciples in the upper room; His last message to them, indicating what should be the emphasis of the good news to the whole world, that atonement may be recovered. He said to them, “No longer do I call you servants.” He’d often called them servants. And there’s nothing wrong with being a

servant, especially a faithful one. Jesus said, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." I'd want to be at least a faithful servant. In fact, what more could we ever ask for or expect, than to hear His words of commendation, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"?

But Jesus says, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends; for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you." You notice the difference between the two. You see, servants do not understand their masters' business. They just do what their told. Friends seek to understand. So Jesus is saying, "I call you no longer my servants, because servants simply do what they're told." And many think that's the ideal. "No," He said, "I call you rather my friends because I want you to understand." With servants, even faithful ones, there's no place for reason, questions or explanations. A good servant simply says, "Master, yes sir. If you say so, sir. Very good, sir."

Servants are often afraid of their masters. Even if they call it a 'godly fear'. And thus they're very concerned with pleasing their masters, and especially with staying out of trouble. Servants tend to be preoccupied with their legal standing with their masters. And often, remember, like the parable of the servants, servants are very concerned about being fairly paid and rewarded for their work. They're also much concerned about avoiding punishment, and making sure that in the end everybody gets all the punishment he so richly deserves. That's servant talk. Servants tend to view the atonement as God's indeed generous arrangement whereby they may escape punishment and receive the reward after all.

Now, again, let's not make fun or light of being servants. It's good to be a faithful servant. And remember Jesus' commendation. And how could we ask for anything more? But how could we turn down His generous offer in John 15:15? He says, "I don't want to call you servants anymore. Because servants just do what they're told. I call you rather my friends, because I want you to understand." You see, that's real atonement. He wants the freely-given, understanding unity that He so relished with Abraham and Moses, the ones He called His trusted and trusting friends. And you remember how freely they talked with God, their friend? Abraham said, "God, how could you do this? Surely the judge of all the earth should do what's right." And God said, "That's the end of our friendship"? No, God said, "I'll make you the model of friendship for the rest of the Scriptures." And when God said, "Step aside and let me destroy these people, and I'll make a great nation of you," Moses said, "God, as I know you, you couldn't do it. It would ruin your reputation." And God said, "No one else knows me that well. Moses, you really are my friend." That's not irreverent. That's real friendship. That's real "at-one-ment".

Now you can force people to be your servants. "On your knees or I'll throw you into the burning fiery furnace," said Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't say, "Now my dear people, be my friends. Love me, trust me, or I'll throw you into the burning fiery furnace." That would make no sense at all. And some who are willing to stay as servants, seem to hear God saying to them, "You obey me,

and do what you're told, or you know what I'll do to you in the end." But has God ever said, "Love me, trust me, be my friend, or I'll torture you to death in the end"? It makes no sense. Who would come up with such a diabolical idea?

Now this is where the cross is so important. There can be no friendship and "at-one-ment" where there is fear. What will God do to those who turn down His offer of friendship, unity, harmony, freedom and atonement? Did Jesus die the death of a sinner? What did the Father do to the Son? In Gethsemane and on Calvary, what did the Son cry? "My God, my God, why are you punishing me? Why are you torturing me? Why are you killing me?" No, "Why have you given me up? Why have you let me go?" It makes sense for God to say, "I want you to be at one with me, in freedom, trust and love. I want you to be my friends. But if you turn this offer down, I'll try and try. But in the end, what else can I do but give you up, and let you go? And dependent as you are on me for life (and for other reasons besides), if I let you go, you will die, as Jesus really and truly died on Calvary, and almost died in Gethsemane." And the Father never laid a hand on Him. Calvary says there is no need to be afraid of God. And when He says, "Be my friend", it's not "be my friend or I'll destroy you". Servants; you can talk that way to them. But friends, never. And friendship, you see, is real atonement.

Paul sums this up in a marvelous passage that we often quote, in somewhat different words than the ones I'll read. 2 Corinthians 5:17, and I'm deliberately using again, the *Good News Bible, Today's English Version*. I've taught Greek since 1942, and I'll tell you that this is a magnificent translation of the Greek. 2 Corinthians 5:17:

When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being. The old is gone, the new is come. All this is done by God, who through Christ, changed us from enemies into His friends, and gave us the task of making others His friends, also.

How's that for the mission of the church? Our message is that God was making all mankind His friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins. And He has given us the message which tells how He makes them His friends. Here we are then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on God's behalf "Let God change you from enemies into His friends." How do you like that?

Now the word that's translated "making friends" is the word that is so often translated "reconciliation". And in that one place in the Scripture I read earlier in Romans, is translated "atonement". If you want, you can substitute "atonement" all the way down through here for "making friends". That's the word in the original. It seems to me that the one who made that incredibly gracious offer of John 15:15 must simply love this American Bible Society translation of 2 Corinthians 5.

Well, there are many so-called theories of the atonement. I just read an excellent article that came from England that describes four major views of the atonement. And as I read it, I thought, "Well I can think of at least five." It doesn't matter a bit how many there are. The all-important question is, does your view of the atonement lead to the restoration of unity, and the freedom of understanding friendship? Like Jesus' story of the prodigal son, does your understanding of the atonement, your view of the atonement, lead you like the prodigal son, to go home? If it does, then your view is like the explanation of the atonement that Jesus talked so much about. Atonement, "at-one-ment", has really taken place, when once again, like Abraham and Moses and Job, we have become trusted and trusting friends of a trustworthy God.

Our loving Father in Heaven, you are the infinitely powerful God who had but to speak, and hang a whole, vast universe into space. And what you desire most of us is not even humble obedience, good as that is, but that we become your loving, admiring and trusting friends, even your understanding friends. And surely we have every reason to trust you when you make this offer all through Scripture, and especially through the experiences of Jesus' life, and Gethsemane, and Calvary. You have shown we have no need to be afraid of you, but every reason to love you, trust you, admire you, be willing to listen to you, accept correction from you, and most of all, be your trusted and trusting friends. Help us to become such, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. {Graham Maxwell. Transcript of sermon at Azure Hills Church, January 20, 1990, Grand Terrace, California}

Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Graham Maxwell

Interviewer: Jonathan Gallagher

Interviewer: Why did Jesus have to die? That's the basic question. First of all, is that the right question to ask?

I've asked that of my students for forty-five years. Bright ones will often respond by questioning the question—which I encourage them to do. Always challenge the question before you start answering it. It may not be a worthy question at all. Did He *have* to die?

Interviewer: That is exactly the emphasis I'd like to put there: Did Jesus have to die?

I'm thinking of it in terms of the fact that there simply was no other way.

Interviewer: Why not?

Can you think any other way to accomplish what had to be done? No doubt God would have used some other method if there could have been some other way. But I think until we discuss what's gone wrong—and needs to be righted—only then can one evaluate what He did, and whether it succeeded in righting what went wrong. You see, with so many, what's gone wrong is that we have broken the rules and we're in legal trouble. We have made a fatal mistake, and we are doomed—not just to die; we are doomed not just to be executed; we are doomed to be punished and then executed.

Now if that's the case, what I'm looking for is what I must do to escape such a penalty. And the Lord says, "Just believe, only believe." Believe what? "I have arranged for that penalty to be paid for," and you get into the whole idea of legal substitution.

Interviewer: But doesn't Ellen White use the phrase quite often, when she's speaking of the atonement, that Christ came to demonstrate the immutability of the Law?

Oh yes. I agree with that one hundred per cent. His death did indeed demonstrate the immutability of the Law. But then you have to go back and ask what the Law requires. The most helpful thing, I find, is to consider what went wrong. Since the Reformation (and before, of course) we have been largely preoccupied with the thought that what went wrong is that I am in legal trouble—and you too—and God has graciously made provision to take care of this. In my opinion, such preoccupation with one's legal standing is the essence of legalism. It is self-centred and even rather childish—but

understandable in a little child, who tends not to think about the people next door. He wonders first about himself—like the little song the children sing that has “Me, me, me” in it.

Paul discussed this problem in Hebrews where he says that though by now you ought to be teachers, you still need milk. You’re still preoccupied with yourselves. And in Ephesians 4 it says we should no longer act like little children but grow up. And as we grow up, one of the marks of maturing is that we become more and more aware of other people and of a larger Universe in which we live.

Now we know there is a whole vast Universe of intelligent beings, all involved in what went wrong, sinless angels included. The book of Revelation was given to help us see that larger view. And what went wrong in the Universe went wrong before we humans ever came into existence, and God proposed to set it right. We know that He created this world to provide the setting within which He would set things right. So we are a spectacle to the whole Universe, as here on this world God did the things that set the Universe right again—whether we humans are saved or not.

Interviewer: So Christ’s death was for our benefit certainly, but also for the benefit of the angels and the unfallen worlds?

Yes—and this of course is where our evangelical friends like Walter Martin would say, “You’re getting it all from Ellen White.” So I love to show these overlooked passages like Colossians 1, Ephesians 1 and 3, where it’s explained that Jesus died to bring peace in heavenly places. And some say, “That’s ridiculous, that’s where peace is.” No. According to Revelation 12, that’s where the war began. “What’s this about a war? Maybe some ancient fathers fancied there once was a war up in heaven”—as Luther once observed.

Some of our evangelical friends have used the book of Revelation to sensationalize the message about the closing up of human history. I think, regrettably, we’ve sometimes done the same thing. As we’ve often discussed before, the center of that book is the war that began in heaven. And it began with Lucifer, who’s described in Ezekiel and Isaiah as standing in the very presence of God. He stood in the “everlasting burnings,” as Isaiah says. He was a blessed and righteous person who could live in “the devouring fire,” the unveiled glory of God. In the presence of God, in the Most Holy Place, he conceived those potentially destructive ideas that finally blossomed into the war that began up in heaven. The war began in the heavenly sanctuary. And we suppose heaven is preoccupied with whether or not I’ve got my legal standing adjusted. Heaven is preoccupied with avoiding another war ever arising again. There or anywhere else. And I believe that just as the war began in the sanctuary, so the war ends in the sanctuary, when everyone agrees that everything, right to the very heart of the Universe, is all right. “Holy and righteous are your ways” they cry in the book of Revelation.

But it [the legal view] is a very narrow view. Those who prefer it sometimes speak of the Great Controversy view as being humanistic. I don't know what they mean by that. It's a much larger view preoccupied with God and the great issues that affect the security of the Universe. We humans are just a drop in the bucket. I think we really need to eat a great deal of humble pie, in order to give a larger message. As Micah says, we need to learn to walk more humbly before our God.

Interviewer: So the death of Christ did do something for us, and it did do something for the angels, and it did do something for all the other beings of the onlooking Universe. Did the death of Christ do something for God?

Well, you start with the war—if you can grant the war. Now if you can't grant the war, you can't grant the Great Controversy, so you have to find some other way to do this. Or if one needs a text for every step, start with Colossians. The death of Christ—it mentions “the shedding of His blood”—brought peace to the Universe. Why would the Universe need peace? Or, looking at Ephesians, why would unity and harmony need to be restored to the Universe? And then inevitably you turn to the war and casting of a third of the angels out of heaven. This is real. This is very, very serious.

What was the war about?? We have no description of the debates that went on among the angels. But we know that in the Adversary's first conversation with the human race, the subject of God was brought up. And God was presented to Adam and Eve as an untrustworthy liar. “God has lied to you. And the subject about which God has lied to you is death: You will not die.” Right there almost on page one in the Bible. So it's no surprise that God's answer is a death. The cross is the answer to the question: Has God lied?

But as you go through the Bible book by book (which is the best way I know to get this perspective) you come to many deaths in the Old Testament. You come to the first death—the killing of a lamb. And Adam and Eve might have said, “Now is that what you mean, that if you sin you'll die? Does this mean you'll kill us just as we have killed this lamb?” I wonder how much they understood that it was representative of a certain death to come.

Soon you come to the Flood, where God drowned all but eight. That would seem to be a pretty clear demonstration, and to loyal angels that was the thing to do. Amens (though surely, solemn ones) rang through heaven when He drowned that bunch. “That's the way to do it!” Except afterwards they found it hadn't won a soul. Instead, necessary as it was, it turned the human race against God more than ever, and they built a tower to escape Him. “Not by might, nor by power” the angels learned as one thing from the Flood. Though they were at the moment rather satisfied, it appears, and waited for God to do it again.

Then came Sodom and Gomorrah. He used fire instead of flood this time, and the angels were amen-ing. They really deserved it, but it didn't win anybody. Even the few God saved from the fire, look how they behaved incestuously right afterwards, and produced some of Israel's longstanding enemies. No, God says, "I'll tell you when the time comes that you're seeing the death that is the final result of sin." And as we all know, it's Gethsemane and it's Calvary. That's the one—and it's not till then that Jesus could say, "It's finished, I've answered that question."

Well, is that the only question that they had? No, you can tell that there were a couple of others intrinsic in what we've been saying. If death is the result of sin, what causes the death? The Devil has been trying to put God in a very bad light—"arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe." I think we can tell what the accusations are by looking at the answers. The Bible is full of demonstrations that God is just the opposite: He's not arbitrary, He's not exacting, He's not vengeful, He is forgiving, He is not severe. Which suggests these were the problems. Is God the cause of the death? And the Devil combined his lie—that the soul is immortal—with his perversion that God has said, "You do what I say or I'll destroy you," and produced the doctrine of eternal Hell. That had to be answered. Does God say "Love me or I'll kill you," or "Love or you'll die, and someday you'll find out why that would be"? The angels didn't understand that death.

Ellen White is so eloquent on that. You remember that in many places—in *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Desire of Ages*—she describes that had God left Satan and his followers to reap the natural results of their rebellion, they would have perished; but the angels looking on, never having seen death, would have misunderstood and so served God from fear. Which produces the character of a rebel. History has demonstrated that those who serve God from fear become rebels.

So it seems to me that the first two questions could have been answered very early in human history. That is, the Son could have come earlier, and He could have died. Then why not come sooner? Why didn't He come in the days of the Flood? People were wicked enough. He could have come then, and been rejected, and gone out to the equivalent of Gethsemane and Calvary in those days.

But there is a third question that has to be answered: what's so serious about serving Him from fear? "God, you are infinitely superior; wouldn't a little holy fear be good for the Universe?—it would keep peace, you know!" And God replies, "That kind of peace turns my children into my enemies." The loyal angels couldn't believe it. "We love you and we're willing to do whatever you say. In fact we think you ought to go down there and wipe out the opposition. Amen!" They couldn't see it. I think that's the subtlest thing of all, something that even brilliant angels couldn't see.

Interviewer: It takes time to understand the character of God...

Yes. So God works and works through the children of Abraham to produce a certain group of people—He doesn't want to produce legalists, He doesn't want to produce enemies—and as He works along He's giving them every opportunity to be His friends, and He produces a few wonderful friends along the way, but in His foreknowledge He knows that by and by He'll have this group. So He works with them, He works with them. And finally He lets the ten tribes go and He works on the last two. You know that chequered history: up and down, up and down, and finally He sends them to Babylonian captivity, and they come back as bad as they were before, but under Ezra and especially under Nehemiah—who pulled hair from heads and beards, and who locked the gates of the city of Jerusalem and threatened to lay hands on them if they broke the Sabbath—finally the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, began obeying to the last detail. And the angels must have thought, well God, now you're succeeding.

Interviewer: But obeying for the wrong reason, surely?

You know what happened. We know they had a fearsome God, because in the name of that fearsome God they tortured His Son to death. So the third great question that had to be answered—because if it's misunderstood you have the seeds of rebellion in the Universe for eternity—required that God have the opportunity to demonstrate to the onlooking Universe the dire consequences of serving Him for the wrong reason, as I believe forensic people do.

Interviewer: So in thinking of what the cross of Christ accomplishes, does the death of the Son do anything to or for the Father?

It gives a basis for viewing Him as He is. It was a demonstration of the truth. But truth is never coercive. I can say no to the truth, I can say no to God's face. I can say no to God's face in the Holy Place as Lucifer did.

Interviewer: But is Jesus trying to change God the Father in any way? If you answer the question "Did Jesus have to die?" from the Father's perspective, it seems to be the answer is "No." The cross was not necessary for God.

If Jesus is God. . .

Interviewer: Can God die to change anything in God?

Doesn't need to change...

Interviewer: It doesn't make any sense...

It doesn't make any sense at all. Now the pagans thought that God *could* be—but this is basically a very pagan idea.

Interviewer: So what of phrases like “pleading the blood” etc? And Ellen White does use the idea that the Father loved the Son more because of His death.

Sure—she talks that way often. How it was a struggle for the Father to let the Son go. I think that’s to help us sense the reality of the thing. I believe that though God has unlimited foreknowledge, as each moment arises He is also infinitely capable of sensing the significance of the moment and the sorrow of the moment, and it is very, very real. I think when God at the end—and He knows it’s coming—cries over even Lucifer: “My son, my son, how can I let you go?” it will be very real anguish. So she tries to put it in terms we can understand—which is utterly Biblical.

Interviewer: So Christ is not “atoning”—to use the modern meaning?

Yes, now the modern meaning. That needs to be cleared up. This idea of atonement as payment of penalty is a modern perversion of the original idea, and I’m interested that so many forensic folk will say that this is a lot of nonsense, this business of “at-one-ment.” But they should look in the Oxford English Dictionary and read about the history of this word. There was a verb to “at one”, something, which was pronounced *atone*.

Interviewer: As for example alone (all one) and only (one-ly)?

Perfectly right. The Biblical conception of atonement is “reconciliation.” What has misled folk, again, is the thought that the word “atonement” is so rare in the New Testament. “Reconciliation” is not rare; “atonement” is used only once. (KJB) That’s the decision of the translators. That is a disservice of the *King James*—but I wouldn’t blame the *King James*. We’re the fools in limiting ourselves to only one translation.

Interviewer: What of those who would say that certainly atonement equals at-one-ment, reconciliation, the restoring of harmony and so on, but the Hebrew from which that was translated, “kaphar,” is to “cover up,” which is linked far more with a legal covering up, eliminating guilt and so on?

Well it would depend what they read into the sacrificial system in Old Testament times. And then why God would use an audio-visual system which is so prone to misunderstanding. There we’re back to Minneapolis: “Why then the law?” It has been misunderstood, and we have been paying the penalty ever since. There are grave hazards even to using the Decalogue, which commands our love—and it cannot be commanded. We need to realize that. The Decalogue was not prescribed for heaven, because parts of it would make no sense to the angels. But the principles of love and trust and peace and freedom are eternal, absolutely eternal.

Interviewer: So what about the blood in the making of the atonement which is so often spoken of in that audio-visual system, as you describe it? What role does the “blood of Christ” play in this atoning?

The emphasis on blood itself—if only we could rediscover what it meant to them in the beginning...Now we know what it became in due course of time...I saw an advertisement for a book this week—I was tempted to get it—it’s a whole history of blood atonement in paganism, and other religions as well as Christianity. Blood has been used all through history, “in many and various ways.” The Bible refers to the blood; I just want the truth about it. What is the meaning of His shedding of his blood? It really means He died. He died. So we want to talk about His death. It’s interesting that if we talk and talk and talk about the significance of His death and don’t use the word “blood,” some say you don’t believe in a “blood atonement.” That’s extraordinary to me. It’s as if there really was “power in the blood,” which is hematolatriy.

Interviewer: Which is what the pagan ideas were: to do something to God.

Yes. That’s right!

Interviewer: So that is why seeing the sacrifice of Jesus as doing something to God is the big mistake?

Well, it implies several very serious theological mistakes on the part of those who take that view. Do we really believe that Jesus was God? Mighty God, Everlasting Father—do we believe that? By implication: “No!” We make Him lesser. And that’s why some of those who opposed “the truth” at Minneapolis were Arians, like Uriah Smith. Arianism fits beautifully. But if the One who came really was co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, we have God on His knees washing His betrayer’s feet with no one in between. And He hoped they’d get the message. Now He couldn’t tell this at Sinai. Why couldn’t He? Well, how do you address a group of people who would dance drunk around a golden calf? That’s what He was dealing with. In the later books in the Old Testament, when they multiplied the rules and regulations, if you read what they were doing...!

Today I was reading Rabbi Hertz’ comments on verses in Hosea—he a Jew himself, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire—he said that the things that some of the Jews were doing in those days, in harmony with the Canaanites around them, were absolutely bestial. What they were doing in sacrificing their children, and so on. It is incredible that God’s own people were doing this. Now how do you deal with them? The Sermon on the Mount? No—He leaned on them, because it was necessary. “Why then the law? It was added because of transgression.”

Interviewer: What else would you see as being dangerous in this idea of trying to “change” God through the death of Jesus?

Well, no one suggests anything had to be done to change Christ. They’ve split the Trinity. And I think to drive wedges between the members of the Trinity is a most fundamental (to use terms that are used by others) heresy. That’s heresy, now. That’s

unchristian. That's unbiblical. I believe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are coequal, co-eternal, equally knowledgeable, equally loving, equally approachable...

Interviewer: So how would you explain to people the whole idea that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" in terms of the nature of the Father?

Well in Hebrews, where it's stated, if one reads the whole section, one notices the considerable use of Jeremiah. As the law required, there were all the sacrifices, for "without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin"—but they never stopped to think of the meaning. But what God really wants is not sacrifice at all. Remember there in Jeremiah—it's marvelous—that what He wants is you, and He wants to write His law of love on your minds and on your hearts, so He really can be your God and you can be His people. That's what He wants! And so He sent His Son, who said, "I've come to obey the Law, I've come to be an example of what it means to keep the Law."

I think that should send us back from Hebrews to Jeremiah: what is it that led the apostle to say this? God in Jeremiah says, "At first when I brought you out of Egypt I didn't give you all those things. I just said let me be your God, and you be my people. But you were so stubborn I had to use these other measures. I had you build the Tabernacle, and I had you build the sacred box, but someday when you have pastors who will give you the truth (Jeremiah 3), you won't remember the box, you'll never make another one, it'll never come to mind, because you'll really know me then, and I'll have written my Law in your hearts and in your minds, and I'll be your God and you'll be my people. And if you're worried about forgiveness—of course I've forgiven you." That Jeremiah 31 is marvelous, and forgiveness is tacked on to the end. The least problem for God is to forgive. But to get his Law in our minds and hearts has been a terribly difficult problem.

Interviewer: So the shedding of blood is not a precondition for God in terms of His forgiveness?

No. Then it had to be clarified and demonstrated that to obey God for the wrong reason can turn us into His enemies. That had to be shown—and God's way is not to *say* it will be that way but to *show* it will be that way. The death of Christ made that plain—shockingly plain to the onlooking Universe. And so the seeds of distrust and rebelliousness were eliminated from the Universe. Of course, there was no distrust, no rebelliousness, among the loyal ones. He was *confirming* their trust.

Interviewer: Because they still had questions in their minds?

That's right—that could have led to rebellion. But when it comes to us down here, the same truth that confirms the trust of the Universe—and will keep it secure for eternity—is exactly the same truth that we need to come back to trust Him, to stop rebelling, and become willing to listen. It's the same truth, it's the same gospel—the

angels need the gospel just as we do. Except we need it more, because we have distrusted, we have rebelled. So God dealt with sin: He sent His son to do away with sin. The forensic says He sent His son to forgive sin; He sent His son to pay the price of sin. No, He sent His Son...the Greek is simply “concerning” sin, and there are many translations of course. I love the translation “He sent His Son to do away with sin.” Forgiving it, paying for it, remitting it, does not do away with it.

Interviewer: What would you say to people who say God is the one who defines His law—that’s an expression of His character—and part of His law is that sinners have to die?

That it’s arbitrary? He just made it that way? One could handle that trivially, but I think it’s serious. One does have to go back and consider the subject of freedom, that apparently God values nothing higher than freedom, and He has opted for freedom—He could have run the Universe another way. He has evidently opted for freedom, regardless of the price. Now you cannot have freedom without order, and we all know that from experience. Nor also, I would say, without self-discipline. Trust, trustworthiness—you can’t have freedom without that, it’s been confirmed. Now it also follows that if we choose to be disorderly, and untrustworthy, and unloving, there will be destructive consequences both in this life, and terribly to come. But not at the hands of our gracious God—all He has to do is to leave us to reap the consequences of our disorderliness. And we’ve seen that from experience too. We know that.

God has determined to run a free Universe. He has refused to budge on that. Now the interesting thing is that if we all lived as described in the Decalogue, there would be perfect security, perfect freedom. Everybody can be trusted; nobody cheats, steals or tells a lie; nobody even wants to sin; everybody loves everybody else, and love is patient, kind, and all those other good things. And that’s why if God changes that law at all, freedom will be diminished. The guarantee of eternal freedom is that God will forever run His Universe as described in the Ten Commandments.

Interviewer: Prescriptive rather than proscriptive, then?

That’s right. Though He had to phrase it that way because of transgression. He was simply saying, “Look, this Universe has to remain orderly, you have to be trustworthy, loving people. We all must be, or we cannot have freedom. And if you choose to go some other way...I’ll work on you!” God makes it as hard as possible to be lost.

I do believe that God made—if you want, you can call it an arbitrary decision—a sovereign decision: it was a decision for freedom. Now that’s the only paradox I’m willing to recognize. He is dogmatic about freedom. But that’s the only thing you can safely be dogmatic about—because you won’t hurt anybody.

Interviewer: Is there any way in which God could have made it so that everybody could have had free choice, free to go their own way, and free to disobey him and go on living?

Yes.

Interviewer: What would have happened?

The Universe would have eventually become a vast penitentiary, with everybody in solitary confinement so as not to bother anybody else, and God and the angels would have become prison wardens. So I see God appealing to the Universe: "Look, I could keep you all alive forever. I kept the Devil alive all these years: I could, I could. But I refuse to be a prison warden, and I refuse to ask all of you to become prison guards." And we say, that's all right. We agree that the only alternative is to let these people reap the consequences—and you know what's going to happen. You say, how do we know? Go to Gethsemane, go to the cross: that's what's going to happen. They will die.

Would we want Him to change that? That's the question. I don't want Him to change freedom.

Interviewer: You obviously would not want to exist in that situation once you realized where it took you...

No. So when people say you don't have a sovereign God, I say absolutely sovereign, and He can run His Universe any way He wants. But He chooses to run it with freedom, which requires mutual trust. There is no other way.

Interviewer: There are some who say "Yes, I understand all that, but I get many benefits from seeing the death of Christ in other ways. I would rather not just have one theory of the atonement; I would like to be true to all the Scriptural pictures, and the legal view is one of them. We know that in our experience when you bring up children you need to correct them, punish and chastise them at times. Surely isn't this a demonstration of God?"

This is very Biblical: whom the Lord loves He disciplines. That runs all through Scripture. Some maybe hear only a small part of this. That's why I prefer, rather than giving a "systematic theology," to say, "Let's go through the Bible book by book." We're going to run into discipline right away, sometimes even as severe as death. But it's always the first-sleep death. The second death is not discipline, for discipline is for instruction, and the second death is not for that. Unless you want to say that the punishment of the wicked in the fire at the end (which would require a miracle to preserve them in the flames) is going to discipline the onlooking Universe, and make sure that sin does not arise again. If God then can accomplish peace and unity by terrifying people, He might just as well have done it in the beginning and Jesus did not need to die.

The interesting thing is that those who hold to that view do not need the death of Christ. If God can accomplish the control of His children by might and power, He could have done it in the beginning when Satan rebelled. He could simply have exercised His sovereign power right then.

You say, "But it might have been misunderstood." And those same people will say, "You have no business seeking to understand—the Sovereign Will can do whatever He wishes." That's another Universe, and that's another God.

Interviewer: In connection with Anselm's penal satisfaction theory of the atonement, one commentator has written: "Many people today would regard it as a weakness in St. Anselm's argument that he cannot easily explain why it was necessary for our Lord to die." Which is what we're talking about here and now. You can't explain why Jesus had to die in that context.

In the trust-healing model, there was no other way. It exalts the cross.

Interviewer: As a lesson, as a demonstration in providing answers?

Yes. Now those who call it Moral Influence Theory have no Great Controversy, or at best a limited one. So all they see in what we've been saying is "How very loving of God to do this, and it wins us to love Him." That's really trivializing this way of understanding things, but that is usually said by someone who stresses Reformation theology, has been especially influenced by Luther, and who de-emphasizes the issues in the Great Controversy—so all he sees is the demonstration of God's love: Abelard. But we're talking about three other things that were never mentioned by Abelard: the questions that divided the Universe. These are of enormous consequence, these are of vast significance. If these questions are not answered, there is no peace and security in the Universe, and Paul says so. Why is Colossians 1—and Ephesians 1 and 3—why are they not included at the heart of the argument? "He shed His blood to bring peace in heavenly places."

Interviewer: Very often the criticism against Moral Influence Theory is that it reduces Christ's death to that of a mere innocent man. How do you react to that?

Well it certainly isn't true of the trust, healing, Great Controversy model of the plan of salvation. When Jesus fell dying to the ground in Gethsemane, it had to be someone God could not be misunderstood as killing. If it had been Gabriel, the legalist would say, "He was not good enough." No: if a mere creature were to die, even a sinless angel, the Universe would still not know but that God had killed him. It was no less than God dying in Gethsemane and on the cross, or we don't have the answers to all the questions.

Interviewer: This idea of extrinsic salvation—that God could have died on the other side of the Universe and the results would have been the same...

Then He—God—needed it.

Interviewer: The forensic view then is really saying that God needed—whatever terms you're going to use—to be placated, appeased, propitiated by the sacrifice of the Son, that in some way the death of Christ changed something in the Father. What of this?

Well then I like to ask them, "Do you think God needed it?" To which they may answer, "No, no. Justice required it."

Interviewer: What is justice?

Now what do you mean, "Justice required it?" "Well, if God had not done it, He would not be just." Why is it important that God be seen to be just? "Well, that's the basis of our trust." Now you're back to the other way of looking at things—that God did this to demonstrate that He can be trusted. And it's interesting that Romans 3:25,26 says that the death of Christ was to show that God Himself is righteous—and therefore can set us right. The idea that He's demonstrating the truth about His character is not palatable to forensic people, but there it is in Romans 3...Incidentally, the same Greek word is sometimes translated justice, sometimes righteousness. No difference!

But there are many other questions one can raise: what if I look at God killing an innocent party so that He can save me? That doesn't obviously look just and righteous, does it?

Interviewer: How do you get around that?

They will say, "You are not capable of making that judgment. God says it is just and righteous." I'll say, "Well then, He didn't need to convince me of His righteousness, He didn't need to show me anything. All He had to say was "I am a righteous God, and what I do is righteous because I am doing it, and I say it's just." Then you don't need the cross. All God has to do is do what He wants to do and tell me that it's just. And now we're back to servant-talk. The friend will say, "This idea of killing an innocent party so you can forgive me doesn't look just and ethical." And God replies, "I sense you ask that in all reverence. You are my friend like Abraham and Moses. Let me tell you why Jesus had to die." The servant says, "I wouldn't presume to ask. You don't need to tell me anything."

How can we dare, how can we be so ungrateful, how can we be so foolish, to reject or ignore God's incredibly gracious and costly explanation? In order to understand why Jesus died, I must accept God's invitation to go right to the cross, in my imagination, and watch Jesus die, and hear His cry, and see how the Father is involved. Then I must fit that back into what I read in all the Bible.

Interviewer: Did Jesus die a "substitutionary death"?

In a way, yes. Either He had to die, or we would die. But even if all sinners were to die, it would only answer the first of our three questions—does sin lead to death? But that would leave the Universe without any answers to questions two and three. The death of Christ answered all the questions. His death was of infinitely more significance than the death of all sinners put together.

Interviewer: Which gives us such an insight into the mind of God Himself. Thanks for sharing your understanding of “Why did Jesus have to die?”

JUSTIFICATION; SET RIGHT WITH GOD

A Graham Maxwell

There once was peace throughout the universe. All the members of God's vast family trusted each other, and all of them trusted their heavenly Father. He in turn could safely trust in them. And where there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness there is perfect peace, freedom and security.

But something went wrong in God's universe. The Bible records a devastating breakdown of trust in His family, even to the extent of war in heaven. (Revelation 12:7-17) The brilliant leader of God's angels – once called Lucifer, meaning 'lightbearer', but now called Satan or 'the devil', meaning 'accuser' or 'adversary' – succeeded in persuading many of his fellow angels that God was unworthy of their faith.

How sin came in. Thus sin entered the universe, for as Paul explains, sin is in essence a violation and breach of trust. (Romans 14:23) Or, as John defines it, sin is an attitude of lawlessness and rebellion. (John 3:4, NEB)

All of God's children – both loyal and disloyal – have been caught up in the consequences of this revolt. Particularly have His children on this planet been disastrously affected by this epidemic of disaffection and distrust.

Through it all God remains our gracious and grieving Father. He does not want to lose any of His children. (2 Peter 3:9) 'How can I give you up, how can I let you go!' is His cry in Hosea. (Hosea 11:8) If only He could win us back to trust Him, He as our Creator could readily heal the damage done.

Setting things right. To set right what has gone wrong in His family, God must first persuade His deceived and hurting children to trust Him once again. All that He has done to make salvation possible, and all that He is willing to do for us is of no avail if we do not trust Him. There is no substitute for trust.

This explains Paul's answer to the jailer in Philippi. When the earthquake broke open the doors of the prison, the terrified man desperately inquired, 'What must I do to be saved?'

This was no time for lengthy explanation. All the jailer needed was Paul's memorably brief reply, ' "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." ' (Acts 16:25-34, NEB)

Some Bible translations quote Paul as saying, '*Believe* on the Lord Jesus.' Others have, 'Place your *faith* in the Lord Jesus.' Actually, all three words, 'faith', 'belief', and 'trust' are translated from the same Greek word used by the apostle.

A question of trust. All God has ever asked of His people throughout the universe is trust. But this is no trivial request. The faith that God desires is more than the mere acknowledgement of His existence and power. The devils have a faith like that, and in their distrust of so powerful a God they 'tremble with fear'. (James 2:19, GNB)

Our heavenly Father desires our love, our reverence, our admiration for His wise and gracious ways, our willingness to listen and obey – all freely given because we have found Him to be so utterly worthy of such regard.

But is it safe to trust in God? Surely it would not be wise to trust someone we do not know – and know well? God's enemies have charged that He cannot be trusted. Has God replied to these accusations? Do we find His answers a sufficient basis for our faith?

The sixty-six books of the Bible are a record of the lengths to which God has been willing to go to convince us of His trustworthiness.

There are no shortcuts to trust. Claims of trustworthiness prove nothing. The devil can make such claims. Hitler claimed he could be trusted, and history showed the folly of believing mere promises and claims without confirming evidence.

Even though God has been falsely accused, there is only one way to meet the charge. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances – especially difficult ones – can trust be re-established and confirmed.

When God came among us. This is why God in so 'many and various ways' demonstrated the truth about Himself, 'to our fathers' through the long centuries of Old Testament history. (Hebrews 1:1, RSV) Finally He sent His Son to live among us. And the way Jesus lived, the way He treated people, the things He taught about His Father, and most of all the unique and awful way He died, were the clearest revelation of the truth about the trustworthiness of God the universe will ever see or need.

What a price God has been willing to pay to restore and confirm trust in His family! And the costly demonstration was not only for the benefit of us sinful mortals. The whole universe has been involved.

Christ did not die for sinful men alone. He shed His blood for sinless angels too! For they, too, needed the faith-confirming message of the cross.

Paul explained this to the believers in Colosse. 'Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.' (Colossians 1:19, 20, GNB)

Twice in his letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote of God's purpose to bring His whole family back together again in unity and harmony. (Ephesians 1:10; 3:10) As Jesus said before His crucifixion, ' "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." ' (John 12:32, GNB)

The cross – a magnet. The 1611 first edition of the *King James Version* has Jesus saying that He will draw 'every man'. But later editions of this most famous of all English Bibles carefully indicate, by placing it in italics, that the word 'men' has been supplied. Paul's larger understanding of the involvement of the onlooking universe in the meaning of the cross indicates that the *Good News Bible* ' "I will draw everyone" ' is to be preferred.

Just how Jesus' death on the cross served to meet Satan's charges and prove the trustworthiness of God's character and government is too large a topic for this brief article. (See Romans 3:25, 26) But suffice it to say that ever since Christ cried out on Calvary, 'It is finished', the loyal angels have never tired of assuring God that He has won their everlasting love and trust. (Revelation 4:8; 5:11-14)

Only here on this planet are there any remaining doubts about the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God!

But the Bible records that through the centuries God has succeeded in winning back many sinners to be His trusting friends. One of the most celebrated of these was Abraham, and the Old Testament stories of his experiences and conversations with God are most encouraging examples of the kind of relationship our heavenly Father desires to have with His children.

Several times Abraham failed to keep faith with God. But finally he came to know and trust God well enough to be willing to sacrifice his son. The Bible offers a most enlightening explanation of how heaven evaluated this demonstration of Abraham's faith.

'Was it not by his action, in offering his son Isaac upon the altar, that our father Abraham was justified? Surely you can see that faith was at work in his actions, and that by these actions the integrity of his faith was fully proved. Here was fulfillment of the words of Scripture: "Abraham put his faith in God, and that faith was counted to him as righteousness"; and elsewhere he is called "God's friend".' (James 2:21-23, NEB)

This passage of Scripture, as translated in the *New English Bible*, contains the famous theological term 'justified'. Through the centuries Christian theologians have developed a considerable vocabulary of Latin origin to describe the provisions of the plan of salvation – such terms as 'justification', 'sanctification', 'propitiation', 'expiation', 'vicarious', 'substitution', and many more.

'Justify' = set right. These are grand old words and part of our Christian heritage. Jesus and Paul, of course, never used them. Jesus spoke Aramaic. Paul wrote in Greek. And, if you prefer, there are much simpler ways of translating the terms they used.

For example, the Greek word often rendered 'justify' may be understood more simply as 'set right', 'put right'. God has been working to put right what went wrong in His universe, to resolve the conflict of distrust in His family. When a person has been won back to trust, it can be truly said of him that he has been set right once again with God.

It is helpful to compare the *Good News Bible* translation of this passage in James about God's regard for Abraham's friendship and faith. 'How was our ancestor Abraham put right with God? It was through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Can't you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. And the scripture came true that said, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous." And so Abraham was called God's friend.' (James 2:21-23, GNB)

Trusting friendship is the very essence of what God has always wanted of His children. He inspired Hosea to write to Israel, 'It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. But they, like Adam, have broken their agreement; again and again they have played me false.' (Hosea 6:6, 7, Phillips)

For many years God pleaded with His erring people to come back and be faithful once again. Patiently He kept on calling, 'Come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God! For it is your sins which have been your downfall. Take words of repentance with you as you return to the Lord; say to him, Clear us from all our evil.' And God promised, 'I will love them with all my heart.' (Hosea 14:1, 2, 4, Phillips)

The prodigal son did just this. He came home with words of repentance. And his father was so glad to see him that he didn't let him finish his confession. This is how our heavenly Father feels about every sinner who comes back, Jesus explained. (Luke 15:10-32)

But Israel in Hosea's day did not choose to come home. And God cried over them, 'My people are bent on turning away from me. . . . How, oh how, can I give you up, Ephraim! How, oh how, can I hand you over, Israel!' (Hosea 11:7, 8, Phillips)

God will miss us if we're lost. He will miss us if we don't come home. Think of the eternal void brilliant Lucifer will leave in the infinite memory of God.

But for many of us the revelation of the truth about our God, the picture of God presented through all of Scripture, leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) and to faith. (Romans 10:17) In trust and confidence we look forward to seeing God.

Though our heavenly Father knows everything about us, we have no need to be afraid. God is forgiveness personified. He will cast all our sins behind His back. (Isaiah 38:17) He will 'send them to the bottom of the sea!' (Micah 7:19, GNB)

And He will not only forgive us but even treat us as if we had always been His loyal children. Remember how God spoke of sinful but repentant David as having always walked before Him, ‘ “with integrity of heart and uprightness” ’! (1 Kings 9:4, RSV) No wonder Paul could say that those who have been set right with God enjoy peace with their heavenly Father. (Romans 5:1)

How can we be sure that we have been set right with God? Or, if you prefer, how can we be sure that we have been justified?

Well . . . have we been won back to trust Him? Are we willing to listen and accept His forgiveness? Do we trust Him enough to allow Him to correct and heal us?

Have we, like David, welcomed the Holy Spirit to create new hearts and right spirits within us? Could we be trusted with the privileges of freedom and eternal life?

Has all rebelliousness gone, and has love taken its place? As more light has come, do we always say yes to the truth? For we have much yet to learn about our infinite God.

We may know as little theology as the thief on the cross. But if we love, admire, and trust in God’s Son as he did that crucifixion day, we are safe to admit to the kingdom. (Luke 23:39-43) Like Mary, it will be our greatest delight to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear Him tell us more about the Father.

You see, to be set right with God, all He asks of us is unreserved, whole-hearted trust.